

# The Christian and Anxiety

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[ 0 : 00 ] Thanks for the introduction. I am going to talk about, as you know, anxiety today. Some of you are regulars are here and would have come anyway. Some of you are not and are probably here because you specifically want to hear about this subject.

And so I just want to do two things today. I want to look at it from a psychological perspective because there's lots of information out there about this, some of which many of you probably know about, but some of you may not. Sometimes it's good to be refreshed on it.

So that's what I'm going to spend actually the first half of this on. And the second half, I'm going to look at it, look at it theologically. So it's just kind of split in two in that way. You've got handouts with you. I don't think there's enough for all of you.

But if you need to, please share with someone else. I realize that this is not, though, just a kind of a conceptual subject.

It's not just something that's theoretical, exclusively psychological and theological, but it's quite personal, isn't it? We all actually have anxiety. It's universal. It's just a part of our everyday life.

[ 1 : 13 ] And some of us suffer it personally and directly, and some of us do so kind of indirectly in the support of others. So I'm really aware that all of us are faced with it in one way or another, either directly or indirectly.

I personally don't suffer from anxiety, but there is anxiety in my nuclear family and in my extended family as well in the form of disorders. And although when I say I never suffered from it personally, I sometimes wonder.

You know, we reflect on our lives looking back. And I actually repeated grade three, and not because of my academic performance, but because of my social performance. And I do wonder if that had something to do with anxiety, though never diagnosed.

Though I quite was happy to repeat school, third grade. Some actually wouldn't kind of be self-conscious about that, of course, one would be at first. But there are lots of benefits to that, too. So I just say that because, one, you know where I'm coming from.

And also just I think that God can actually use our anxiety in our own personal life and relationship with him, but also in our relationships with one another as well for great benefit.

[ 2 : 26 ] So let me also say, though, that I'm not an expert on this subject. So I'm a pastor, do some theologizing, taking a class or two at a seminary out in Langley, because it covers subjects actually like this.

I know that we do at Region as well. But there are lots of other experts around St. John's that could speak on subjects like this. There are some medical people, actually, in the audience here today. I realize that you could speak on this, too, and look forward to actually your contribution to our discussion. But we also have members in the congregation, one who teaches at Adler Psychological College.

We have others who are therapists, counselors, and so on and so forth. So I'm not kind of the expert on this, and we've got lots of members around St. John's who do well on this subject. But here's my motivation for talking about this, in addition to what Alexandra already said about just the pervasiveness of anxiety in our culture. It actually came to me like this through my partner in ministry, Margaret Wilson.

[ 3 : 34 ] And Margaret once said to me, after caring for people in the congregation, we need to do something about anxiety. And I said, no, we don't. Leave it to the experts.

And actually, if you don't do something about it, you actually are kind of doing something about it. Maybe that was anxiety, because a big feature of anxiety is avoidance and separation from it, not kind of being exposed to it.

But here I am about kind of six months after that, talking to you about anxiety and having taken a couple courses in psychology. And every course will cover some dimension of psychology and how we actually at this institute, which is ACTS out in Langley, kind of integrate our faith with subjects like this, such as psychology.

So that's kind of my motivation for doing this. I think it would not be responsible. It wouldn't be good care if we weren't trying to address anxiety in our congregation in some form or another.

So those are just some kind of introductory remarks. I think that psychology, and that's what this is kind of coming out of the first half, needs theology.

[ 4 : 47 ] But I think theology needs psychology as well. I've learned some things about psychology and been able to use that with practice and even power in just the past six months in a way that I actually hadn't before here at St. John's with respect to things like this, anxiety and anger and sadness and other subjects in that whole discipline.

But let me just say this about the relationship before we really get into this between psychology and theology then. This is a quote from Thomas Oden.

Some of you may have heard his name before. He's a professor at Drew University. And he said this about pastors and care and the relationship between these two disciplines. He said, long before psychology was a distinct profession, pastors engaged in activities that required psychological wisdom.

Pastors have struggled for the health of persons and the life of souls in ways that anticipate and resemble contemporary psychotherapies. I think that's there in front of you.

And so it's interesting, I think, Oden's observation. He was an academic. And as I said, at Drew University, and for the most part, he was a liberal.

[ 6 : 07 ] He was an innovationist. He called himself a movement theologian. Whatever movement came up, he went along with. And then he was going on a sabbatical. And when he went on a sabbatical, he took only books from his library that were written before the Reformation and a penny dropped for him.

He learned that he was being quite innovative, as he characterized a movement theologian. And so he went back to the foundation of the faith, which was the Bible.

But then he looked at consensual thought. And so he wrote this book called *After Modernity What?* Coming out of that. And then he also wrote a book called *After Therapy What?* And so I think that his observation, he's written this kind of great pastoral theology.

He has a four-volume set of pastoral theology as well, which includes a whole range of subjects, including care and anxiety. And I think his observation is really helpful for us to know that there's lots of information that we're receiving on a regular basis with respect to this discipline of psychology and anxiety.

And we need it. What's going on in terms of brain science and health is quite amazing. It's also important to kind of remember that kind of deposit of wisdom that's come from pastors, theologians, academics in the time.

[ 7 : 26 ] So let's keep going at this then and look at the situation of anxiety in the world in which we live with men. The contemporary situation of Western civilization, remarked by a Catholic theologian by the name of Chihak, he says, is marked by profound anxiety.

And so several factors have converged to create and intensify this anxiety in our culture. And he just named some. It's not exhaustive lists, but some of you would probably say, yeah, that sounds right.

He names the rise of atheism, technology, the annihilation of hope, natural disasters, and terrorism. It seems like all of those things. Sometimes they just hold anxiety.

It seems like sometimes they're caused by or they cause anxiety. But the question is, that's an opinion of his, a statement that he makes, but can it be validated?

Is there any kind of research that says anything about anxiety in our culture in this day and age? So look at some of the stats, Canada, around the subject of anxiety. And one area would be to look at the extent of anxiety in our culture.

[ 8 : 37 ] Did you know that anxiety is the second most diagnosed mental illness in our country? The second most.

Anyone hazard a guess what is the first most? Nope. One more. No more. Substance abuse.

Yeah. So whether it be illicit drugs or alcohol or even prescribed drugs, substance abuse is number one. Which is interesting when we start to think about the numbers around anxiety.

And one is this. So anxiety desires mild to severely affect 5% of households in our population. That was back in 2002. If 10 years later, that doubled to almost 12%.

So 3 million Canadians, just in this category, 18 years or older, reported that they had mood or anxiety disorders. That doesn't actually include children younger than 18.

[ 9 : 41 ] That's a pretty high percentage. If you just do the math, if there are 600 people that come through the doors here at St. John's on Sunday, that means you have 60 people that are walking through the door, not including children, that suffer from anxiety.

Also, then, the impact of this, just in life in general, younger people are more aware of the strength of anxiety's impact on their life than any other kind of category.

Younger people being defined by 18 to 34. So 35 and up, this wasn't included, but 84% of them, in the research that was done, were well aware of the impact of anxiety on life in general.

Canadians in, this is a different category now, 25 to 34 years old, are most likely to believe that depression or anxiety has a strong impact, not just in general, but on their relationships with other people.

When it comes to the subject of work, again, Canadians, I'm looking at a specific category here again, 18 to 34, because it's more in this category than any of the other ones, which is mostly including us.

[ 10 : 47 ] Most of us are not, most of us are older than 35 years here, I think. But here it is, 85% of them were convinced that it impacts their work life.

And here's an interesting thing, though, that on BC, on the coast of BC and the Atlantic coast, we are less likely to think that people will think less of us because we actually have a struggle with anxiety.

There's less of a stigma from our perception around it on these coasts than actually in between. So people in Ontario think that there's more stigma attached to anxiety than people on the coast.

So impact, what about treatment then? Here's some interesting statistics, just three of them. 49 of those who feel they have suffered from anxiety, get this, have never gone to see a doctor about the problem.

So almost half of the people that suffer from it don't get medical help. And then 29% of Canadians under the age of 34 visited a doctor for depression or anxiety compared to 53% of those who are older.

[ 11 : 55 ] So the younger category, though, is less likely than the older one to go and seek help. Maybe actually when they get older, they'll go and get the help that they need. But anyway, those are the statistics.

And finally, younger people are more likely to think that treatment will simply allow people to better cope with symptoms. Almost three-quarters of those who were asked about that question thought that to be true.

Okay, so those are just some statistics about the impact, the effect, rise of anxiety in our culture. But let's look at, then, anxiety from a psychological perspective.

So the etymology of the word anxiety means constriction of throat or heart. I'll talk about experience a little bit later, but just kind of think about that for a second when you think about anxiety.

It's this kind of constriction, this kind of grip, this kind of grasp on us in that way. The definition of anxiety, then, would be it's a condition in which a person feels extreme worry or fear or anxiety when faced with certain objects, situations, feelings, or thoughts.

[ 13 : 09 ] Those objects could be things like heights or crowds or maybe bugs or spiders, things like that, situations, like, I don't know, maybe public speaking. I'll do that.

But some of you would never get up here, and that's okay. Sometimes it just has to do with thoughts that are recurring. You're kind of going over and over and over again in your mind. And even memory, something actually has happened in your past, an adverse event, maybe when you were a child, maybe not when you were a child, maybe as an adult.

And then there's anxiety that's held and bound up in that. It's also not only a condition but a universal emotion experienced by everyone everywhere. Some people look at this and say we even see anxiety actually in the animal kingdom.

And some would go as far as in the psychological world to say that we were actually designed with anxiety and fear. And there are positive things about it, but there are also negative aspects to it as well.

So it's positive when it actually motivates us, but it's negative when it's out of control and we're unable to function. But there are also kind of similarities and then differences between some of the language that I'm using here, talking about fear and anxiety and worry.

[14:17] And so some of the similarities in this are with respect to a response or reaction to a perceived threat. So whenever you're talking about anxiety, it actually has to do with some kind of threat.

And in some cases, our response to that is one of fear, which is kind of an intense emotional and or cognitive reaction to an immediate threat, right?

That's about fear. And anxiety is an intense emotional or cognitive reaction to focusing on a future threat. So the difference is one is immediate, but one is more in the future.

And with respect to fear, then it activates what's known as the somatic nervous system in preparation of danger, in which one will either react by fighting or flighting.

You've probably heard of that before, right? Easy. Sometimes people freeze, but it doesn't really apply to these too much. So what happens when it's an immediate fear and it's upon you and your fight mode will result in a rise actually out of your anger.

[15:20] But anxiety is actually different, which causes one to kind of shrink back, withdraw, maybe escape, avoid, or engage in some kind of securing stability and safety for yourself.

And of course, there are levels and degrees of anxiety. There are the kind of low ones, which are normal, and those things actually help us get things done.

They help us start things, complete things, enhance, maybe even accomplish something that we wouldn't do otherwise if we didn't feel just a little bit of threat of that deadline coming down or something else for that matter.

But on the other hand, they can be high and abnormal and they keep us from getting things done.

They impede or prevent performance. We underfunction or we can't actually do anything at all.

We're stuck. We're blocked. And so this is when we start thinking about the disorder of anxiety. It causes unexpected or unhelpful kind of blockage, anxiety that seriously impacts our lives, not only ours but other people around us as well.

[16:24] It includes how we think, feel, and act. And it's accompanied by all this kind of tension, motor tension, and what's known as autonomic overactivity. Let's look at just the effect really kind of, really super briefly here, right?

So when you're anxious, it affects your body, your emotions, and also your thought life. You get a racing heart, you're nauseous, fearful.

Sometimes you do freeze as well. So it manifests itself. You experience it actually in your body. And there are triggers too, which are both internal within us, but they're external as well that we anticipate.

Okay, so that's a lot about kind of psychology. It looks like you're kind of tracking with me. Let me just do my own kind of interlude here into the Bible before we get to the theology though.

So far I've spoken about anxiety personally and what's called phenomenologically. But this is Learner's Exchange and you want to have some of the Bible and so do I. So let's look at some of these words just quickly in the Bible.

[17:32] So when the subject of fear comes up, talking about the subject of anxiety, in the Pentateuch, you know, the first five books of the Bible, the word fear comes up 44 times. So it's there a lot.

In the wisdom literature, it's 123 times. Fear is just a fact of life. In the Gospels, it's 52 times. In Paul's letters, 16 times.

The word terror in all of the Bible comes up 77 times. What about anxiety and anxious? Actually, only 30 times that word kind of literally comes up in the Bible.

But the word troubled and distressed comes up 45 times. So let me just do a kind of a quick survey, two in the Old Testament, two in the New Testament, of this subject of anxiety and fear.

So first one from Genesis. I'm going to need a Bible actually, not right now, but later. I'm wondering, Elizabeth, could you get me one please? Thanks. So this quote, listen to this closely then.

[18:31] Is it? I don't think I actually have it there. Genesis 32 verse 7. Then Jacob was greatly afraid, there's that word, and distressed. He divided the people who were with him and the flocks and herds and camels into two camps.

I don't know if you remember this from reading the Bible, but this is actually when Jacob is going to counter his brother Esau, you know, after ripping his brother off, stealing the birthright, the inheritance, all that.

He has a future threat, right? A perceived one. He thinks that this is going to happen. And so he's actually getting ready for this. It's kind of a division of his resources.

Everyone won't need one, Elizabeth. So here's this word, afraid and distressed, or he's very, very anxious about this.

Still in Genesis, almost at the end of the book, Genesis 45 verse 5, Joseph's brother, brother's anxiety. Read, And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here for God sent me before you to preserve life.

[19:38] The threat's actually not upon them. They're thinking about in the future what's going to happen here. And Joseph, pastorally, anticipates the anxiety that they're experiencing, the threat that they may be feeling, thinking about this that's somewhat external to them, although actually it's more internal in the way they're actually processing this.

So those are two kind of just only, two Old Testament ones only in the book of Genesis about anxiety and distress. So the Sermon on the Mount is another place to look. I know that we all know this one very well.

Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink or about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? So the word anxious is explicitly used there. And that's not the only time in the context of that. It's used more than that. It's really interesting though that actually in context, which I won't do now, but to look at what Jesus is talking about before that and also what he's talking about after that.

It's not being insensitive to our anxiety and just say, don't be anxious. He's actually anticipating and by way of discipleship and then following them, preparing them for the anxieties that will come in their life and how to respond.

[20:57] And then Paul says this, of course, another famous one on the subject of anxiety. The Lord is at hand. Do not be anxious about anything but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving.

Let your requests be made known to God. So another really key one. Again, it's really important to kind of read this in context. And I'll do some of that for you now.

So Paul at the beginning of chapter 4 tells the Christians in Philippi to stand firm. The next thing he does by way of command is tell them to help these women.

There are some women who are doing great gospel work there. And then before this kind of command or invitation about anxiety, he tells them to rejoice in all things.

And then after this, he gives this great list of Christian practices and he tells them to practice this. And then after that, in verse 14, he says this to them, Share in my troubles.

[21:58] So they're really anxious about what's going on with Paul because he's in prison, right? There's great threat to him, his life. It may be perceived. He hasn't actually been killed yet.

Hasn't been made a martyr. They're anticipating and wondering what on earth is going to actually happen to Paul. They're quite anxious about this. And he thanks them for sharing in his troubles, like his anxieties, his fears.

That's the way that word troubles can be used too. So that's just a bit of an interlude, a taster when we get to some of the more theological stuff later. But that's just to show that there's loads of words and vocabulary around this subject in the Bible.

It's not... It's all there. Okay. So let's look at this a little bit more psychologically.

Just some of the causes and influences on this. There is actually no single cause, single one cause around this. There are a bunch of different variables that come together that cause and have effects on anxiety.

[23:05] And there are different factors. Some of them are biological, psychological, and some of them are societal. So briefly, biological. Sometimes we inherit some anxious traits.

There's brain chemistry that contributes to it too, and even brain activity. Sometimes psychologically, there are learned behaviors and responses to events that happen in our life.

And there are also learned even in our family of origins and the way we respond to those certain things. There are thinking patterns that are developed. If something happens, we think about that a certain way. And anxiety as a result of that and compounds.

Also, in kind of societal terms, there are some things that will influence some cultures that will be actually more anxious than others. There are other systems that tend to be more anxious.

Organizations that tend to be more anxious.

Some of that has to do with the way that we deal with adverse events in life and the way that it's talked about. But here's the thing. This is a hopeful note, I think. You can look at a lot of the causes about this and sometimes we think that we know the cause and we'll be able to dress it, cure it, cope with it, those sorts of things, right?

[ 24 : 12 ] But cause actually isn't required for effective treatment. One of the most effective treatments for this, at least psychologically, medically, psychiatrically, is cognitive behavioral therapy.

More a little bit about that later, but not a lot. But there are triggers for our anxiety. There are internal ones, which I mentioned before. That is, internal ones where we might actually have some kind of physical sensation and then we have this kind of emotional reaction to what's going on.

But also, internally, it's a cognitive reaction when we're actually thinking about something, we're threatened by something, we're perseverating actually on something. And then remembering over and over again and then actually attending to this threat.

But some of the threats then are, some of the anxiety is caused by external threats. So threats of places, objects, situations, activities. Again, anxiety is experienced in our bodies, our minds, our emotions, but we express it actually outwardly.

And the result then is to avoid or to escape or try to find some kind of safety in the midst of this perceived threat that's in the future that seems to be kind of coming down, coming our way.

[ 25 : 30 ] So places, for instance, that are external can be perceived as a threat to us for whatever reason. Maybe it's a past experience. We know that some people are anxious about going to hospitals or doctor's offices or dentist's offices.

Or if it's an object, you're maybe afraid of a dog or some other kind of animal or something else that's material. Maybe your anxiety is because of the threat of big gatherings or maybe a small gathering or being actually in a small room claustrophobia is a kind of anxiety.

Maybe it's just exposure to germs, things like that. Those are things that are actually external. So there's lots of kinds of manifestations, descriptions of anxiety then.

And I'm just going to list these off. I won't go through them. Most of them I think you've maybe heard of. But I find actually, you know, when these things are the most relevant, then you kind of dig into, well, what exactly are the symptoms of this form of anxiety?

So there's panic, panic attacks, right? People have those, sometimes regularly, sometimes just occasionally. which actually isn't an anxiety disorder, but often gets lumped in with this because there are other forms of anxiety that include the panic attacks.

[ 26 : 53 ] There's social anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, generalized anxiety, separation anxiety, and then there's substance-induced anxiety.

Those are just a few. So what about treatments and interventions there? Well, one of the most effectively, this is one of the most effectively treated psychological diagnoses that there is.

Lots of other ones aren't as easily treated, but anxiety actually is quite well treated. And so let me just say this, you know, kind of in the context of life of St. John's, or if you've been in other churches, or you will be, pastors should always recommend when they hear about anxiety, if they think it's abnormal, to go and see your doctor.

If you're experiencing this, it's important to do that. If you know someone who is too, always recommend go see your doctor. And there's medication for doctors, or sorry, medication for patients.

But there's other responses, other ways to treat this too, which you should get referrals from, from doctors, which includes therapies, which may be a cognitive approach, or a behavioral approach, sometimes relaxation, and even other things with respect to lifestyle adjustments can help with anxiety too.

[ 28 : 21 ] So it's, it's, it is a treatable, and a highly effective treatable disorder. I hope that that's hopeful to you, because I know that some of us probably have been struggling with something for a long time.

And, and sometimes that can actually be discouraging. How long will this, this go on? And then, you know, then what we, what do you do? And I think that hope actually is the key word when we're thinking about anxiety, because it is something that has to do with a threat that's actually in the future.

Depression actually tends to be with something that's in the past or in the present. I know you can feel hopeless when you have depression, but it tends to be rooted there, where this is actually in the future.

And I think that the, that the hope in the Christian life is a, is a key thing that we bring theologically to the matter when we're talking about anxiety. Right?

So, let's look at it theologically. Anxiety and fear are normal emotions and conditions that I said about earlier designed to protect us, that is individuals from potential danger.

[ 29 : 28 ] That's the psychology of it. But fear and anxiety, distress, trouble, are described in the scriptures, as I alluded to earlier. These subjects and experiences are not the exclusive discipline of medicine, social sciences, psychology, and psychiatry.

I'm really thankful for all of those, right? They're really, really important. But I think that we as Christians have something to bring to bear on the matter as well. So let's, let's look at some of those things.

There, sometimes we think that, that some of the medical world in psychology isn't very friendly to theology. I've actually found that, that that's not true.

And even in some surprising places, I found the psychology and psychiatric disciplines quite open, if not explicitly to the theist approach on this, at least spiritualities, and are quite interested in the benefits of spirituality.

So, we need psychology, and we need theology when it comes to this subject. And I think a theology of person and anxiety, sorry, I think a theology of person and anxiety, not as recent as modern or post-modern social sciences.

[ 30 : 44 ] That was kind of confusing, wasn't it? I guess this is what, this is what I think. In terms of theology that's brought to bear, Christians have been thinking about anxiety for a long time.

So, you can go back to St. Augustine, or Irenaeus, or St. Thomas of Aquinas. They were all thinking and writing about this subject. More recently, we had people like Soren Kierkegaard.

I know that isn't super recently, but since the Reformation. But you have someone like Hans von Balthasar, who's writing about this, and Richard Baxter has written something quite marvelous about depression, and anxiety as well.

So, whenever we think about what it means to be human and anxiety, it's really important that we go back to the narrative of the Christian life.

You have to have some paradigm, some structure of, one, our creation and fall, two, salvation and atonement, and three, the things that are to come.

[ 31 : 46 ] These are all brought to bear when we reflect on what anxieties will be. Let me just give a really quick summary of those three things. I think you have them written down there, right? Creation, fall, salvation, atonement.

Things to come? Yes? No? It's there? Okay. Quickly. Creation and fall. We learn the origin and limit, but promise and purpose of man and woman in Genesis.

We learn, right? The origin and limit, promise and purpose for man. As well as, though, we learn about sin, and here's the key word, I think, when we think about anxiety with respect to this narrative, the separation of man and woman from God, who suffer, and anxiety is a suffering, and we know that ultimately, though, anxiety doesn't lead to death, I don't think, but someone might correct me about that, but ultimately, our sin, which separates us from God, we know the consequence is death.

Salvation and atonement, though, climatically, we learn that the promise of salvation, which restores the relationship between the image bearers, that's those of us who are created, and the creator, through the Christ redeemer, by his own separation and suffering on the cross.

So Jesus' separation, actually, from God, when he experiences the wrath on the cross, is a key, actually, feature in the way that we actually understand anxiety, because there's this external threat, we try to avoid things, separate ourselves from those things.

[ 33 : 22 ] And I think that Jesus is facing the death on the cross and the experience of separation, is brought to bear on the way that we understand anxiety. And then finally, with respect to things to come, creation, which was lost, or ruined, or tainted with sin, will become new in the second coming

of Jesus Christ.

And all things will be made new with, we know, no sadness, no sin, but also, actually, no separation. and then we'll have this uninterrupted communion between God and all of creation, including us.

And I think that that influences the way that we think about anxiety, too. This is the destiny of humanity, men and women. But it raises the question, what is our purpose and how does that impact our understanding of anxiety?

So, let's see about this. Okay? We have this great statement of purpose in an evangelical tradition called the Westminster Confession.

And it asks the question, was the chief end of man? And that is, the answer is, to enjoy God and to glorify Him forever. But how do we do that? That confession may do so, and our catechesis does some of that, too, in the Anacan tradition.

[ 34 : 42 ] But I think Jesus tells us that when He converses with the scribe about the greatest commandment, what it really means to be human. Think about anxiety and how that seems to impact and affect our humanity.

What does it really mean to be human, then? And Jesus says, to love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength. And then there's the second commandment that follows that. But I think that this provides for us our purpose and also a kind of a biblical anthropology to help us understand anxiety. So, when Soren Kierkegaard wrote about the subject of anxiety and the Christian in a book called Sick Unto Death, and then specifically a chapter called A Concept of Anxiety, he understood humanity or anthropology by being body, soul, and spirit.

Hans von Balthasar responded in his book to Kierkegaard in the same terms of this body, actually soul, and spirit.

But I can't help but think, well, what about Jesus' understanding of what it means to be human, to love the Lord your God while your heart, mind, soul, and strength? So I want to look at that.

[ 36 : 03 ] I want to look at when we're suffering from or supporting people with anxiety, what does it mean to be human in the midst of this? And Jesus starts with love.

What it means to be human is to love. The call of the Christian is to love God and Him only. In the summary of the law, Jesus and the scribes are in agreement about this most important commandment.

Succinctly put, this love is exclusive. It contains no graven images. It has really high regard for Jesus or for God's name. Love is an essential choice not to forego, but to practice, and we can do that when facing anxiety.

Anxiety can undermine the practice of the presence of God in prayer and praise, but it can also be cause for prayer and praise more than ever. Now, Michael Lundy, he's a medical doctor and clinical psychologist.

He revised, updated, and annotated Richard Baxter's book, Depression, Anxiety, in a Christian Life. It was introduced by Dr. Packer. Lundy makes this claim about Baxter with respect to love and anxiety.

[ 37 : 15 ] He says that Baxter was the clear forerunner of what we call CBT. In Baxter's book, the Puritan submits eight cures for, and he lumps together depression and anxiety, so you have to wait through a little bit when he's talking about depression and when he's talking about anxiety, but ten principles to practice and 31 truths about God's grace regarding depression and anxiety.

In one of his eight cures, he is really quick to commend our love for God by contrasting it with our love for the world. This is about love the Lord your God, right?

He says this, Determine in yourselves more diligently ever to overcome an inordinate love of the world. God is very jealous, even in his love, against every idol that has shown too much affection and with any of that love which belongs to him.

This is one of his eight cures cures for anxiety. The other seven cures are worth considering, but I'm not going to read all seven of those to you. But I would have preferred actually that Baxter might have actually put this into his statement of ten principles to practice.

Of course, you can practice this, but he puts it in as a cure. That is, not loving the world, but loving God as a cure, a treatment, a resolve for anxiety and depression.

[ 38 : 43 ] But, I'll defer to Baxter. He's stood the test of time. I think that that's a good place to put it, and it's not the only thing to cure anxiety, which I think is suggested by the other seven that he

includes as well.

Anxiety, though, because of its effect, makes not loving the world, but loving God good news.

Anxiety makes a person avoid, withdraw, protect oneself from a perceived threat.

Anxiety is very isolating and carries with it embarrassment, shame, and alienation. God accepts and wants our love of him while, I think, and through our anxiety.

We can love God and be anxious at the same time. And yes, Baxter is right that some of the time it will help in the cure.

Not exclusively, but there are other ways as well. To love the Lord our God who first love us is to be human. When we love him, we first, when we love him first, we are most like him and show forth his image.

[ 39 : 57 ] Love of God is first of all what it is to be human. We are as human as it gets when we keep in practice this love of God. Now, sometimes when I hear people talk about humanity, they describe it in a different way.

I don't know if you've heard it this way too, but they'll say, well, she's only human. You know? Well, he's only human if you women felt kind of singled out.

Right? And there's something behind that, right? It's as if our shortcomings, our moral failures, even our explicit sin is actually what makes us human. Now, I think that that actually twists our humanity.

If you want to see what real humanity looks like, full humanity, we look at Jesus Christ who was sinless. Right? So, human nature, though, has limitations.

Limitations in time and space. Those are some of the things that contribute to our humanity, but ultimately, it's this love of God. Well, that's the first thing to say about the purpose of humanity with regards to loving God.

[ 41 : 07 ] Let me say one other thing before we actually get to the, if we have time, to get to the heart, the mind, the soul, and the strength. And that's this. And that is that also what it means to be human is to belong to God.

An Old and New Testament synonym for love, I think, is the word covenant, which means belong.

There's this motto that runs right from Genesis all the way through to Revelation that I will be their God and they will be my people.

It's kind of a motto of God's covenant that these people belong to him. He actually belongs to them. He's bound to them in this covenant. There's this great sense of belonging. And the love of God for us and our response of love to him is the covenant which makes us belong to him.

That covenant, love, means we belong to him and it is our identity. It shapes our identity. In other words, in general terms, you are what you belong to.

Right? So, you're members of St. John's, right? You belong here. You belong here. That makes you a member of St. John's. Here's another one relevant to some of you today.

[ 42 : 18 ] If you belong to the Toronto NBA team, that makes you a Raptor. If you don't belong to the team, you're a Raptors fan.

Right? What you belong to is your identity. If you belong to God by loving him, right, that makes you a child of God in his covenant.

And so, the love of God and for God expressed through the covenant means we belong to him. It's our primary identity. We are his people, his children, his nation.

We are his body, his bride, his members. That's who we are. We belong to God through this covenant. And this identity is more important. It is more primary than our anxiety.

We may suffer from anxiety, but we are not anxious persons or anxious people because our identity actually is in God through Christ and by his spirit.

[ 43 : 24 ] This isn't a denial of anxious experiences. It's not avoidance of anxious symptoms. Anxiety can dominate the way that we see ourselves. But I think it's good news that the love of God and for God means that we belong to him and not to our anxiety.

And the good news is that we belong to God and not our anxiety is a game changer. It is thinking about ourselves and condition differently.

It doesn't replace the need for coping and curing from anxiety, receiving medical attention, care from others. Don't forego that, but I think it does improve the way we see ourselves in the face of anxiety.

And belonging to God will shape the way that we see ourselves in the midst of this suffering and supporting others in anxiety. It's 10 to...

Alexandra, should I... Stop. It's a communion service. Alexandra, should I keep going at 10 to the top of the hour? Okay.

[ 44 : 34 ] Let me see. Thanks for... Okay. If you have too many questions, you'll have to come back.

Okay. Okay. So let me go on from here to the heart, the mind, the soul, and the strength with respect to how we understand ourselves as human beings in the face of humanity.

The remainder, I think, after love of Lord your God is what most of us hear. Somehow, love of Lord your God gets lost with this list with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength. We may not have expected to spend much time on love.

I hope that's not making you anxious, but here we go when it comes to the heart. Not only do we have hearts, minds, souls, and strength, but we are heart, mind, soul, and strength.

These four faculties make us who we are too. So the first one, the heart. The Hebrew understanding of the heart is that it's something that's all-encompassing.

[ 45 : 41 ] Right? I did a search on this too in terms of the numbers. I shared some of those with you earlier. The heart turns up in the Bible 950 times. Your heart matters to God.

Right? That's a lot. The heart seems like it is this central spiritual system of the human being. It's more than an organ pumping blood, carrying oxygen.

It's more than a place for resident affections just waiting to be released. It's what seems to move the whole person either away or towards God and others.

Think about our opening prayer from the communion service, which some of you will hear later, maybe you've already heard. Almighty God, unto you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid.

Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts. Right? The heart actually matters to God. And really, according to this prayer, we can close our hearts off to God, but it's not really closed to Him.

[ 46 : 45 ] Our hearts are an open book. He sees right into our hearts. He actually sees the things that we don't see. We confess that we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. Right?

The heart really, really matters to God. And it is a place where we actually hold our anxious thoughts. because it says cleanse the thoughts of our hearts. Our heart and our thoughts are really closely connected.

And God knows our heart. It's open to Him. We don't need to shrink back from Him. And He will promise as He will do what He promises, which is to cleanse our hearts.

I think this is good news to one who suffers or supports the anxious. Because we are known to God, our heart and all that is in us is no mystery to Him.

All our fears, our distresses, our anxieties, none of it is surprising to God. And so while avoidance is sometimes both a cause and effect of anxiety, you know, the racing heart, the pounding pulse, tightness of breath, shortness of breath, all of our anxieties are known to God.

[ 47 : 59 ] that's the heart. Every anxious thought known to God too. But the mind is also a major factory of anxiety. Most of our anxieties begin and actually continue in the mind.

It affects our bodies too, but the mind is the central system of anxiety. That's how it's actually described in some psychological terms. Our minds, our brains, our fear and worry factors, factories.

Now, having said that, it's not all that bad. There's other things that are good that go on in your mind. But you know throughout scripture how many times that we're commanded to fear the Lord.

So, thinking about anxiety and fear. Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. And the wisdom literature repeats this often, over and over again. Fear is not just some kind of feeling.

Fear is actually a matter of cognition. With our mind we fear or revere our Lord and other people or things of great value. And this fear, which is so close to anxiety, is a kind of, we know this, it's a reverence, isn't it?

[ 49 : 13 ] We often show reverence to that which we fear and sometimes makes us anxious. Anxiety isn't usually associated with something though that we think less about.

It's actually something that we think more about. Maybe we give it too high of regard, but ultimately what we need to, what is helpful here is thinking about this fear of the Lord whom we hold in actually high regard.

So our minds are for reason and reflection and remembrance with respect to this fear of the Lord and in light of anxiety.

this reason which we hear in Isaiah 1:18. The Lord invites Isaiah, come, let us reason together, says the Lord.

It's for reflection. Jesus exhorts Peter to do this when he says, not using the word reflect though, but I think saying this, for you are not setting your mind on things above.

[50:15] Jesus actually tells Peter what's going to happen and Peter tries to rebuke Jesus and Jesus responds to him, look, you're setting your mind on things on earth, not on things above.

Think about things above. And then our minds are for remembering. Exodus 3 verse 15, the Lord said to Moses after revealing his name to Israel, this is my name forever and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.

Our minds are really, really, powerful, right? They're for reflecting, they're for remembering, and for reasoning. And so it's human to do all of these things.

Our minds are a great gift and we are learning more and more about the mind and especially as it applies to the subject of anxiety. And especially our memories and how it actually stores pain and trauma and adverse events.

neurosciences have mapped out structures of the brain including the central nervous system, what's called the peripheral nervous system and stress response systems.

[51:31] Part of the central nervous system, and here's an interesting thing, and it's what's called the limbic system. I don't know if you know about this, but it's really quite remarkable. this limbic system stores memory of adverse, distressing, traumatic events in our life.

And it can make us actually feel anxious or generate anxious experiences even when we don't want it. It's really almost impossible to resist.

And so it can explain our anxious feelings for no apparent reason to places, objects, situations, smells, sounds. And it's something called the amygdala, which is the key player in which registers and retains these memories that result, give rise to anxiety.

So, it doesn't store only negative memories, but mostly it's really actually interested in them. And so it raises questions about this anxiety that we can have in our life and how we're coping with this or even cure comes about.

And there's lots of kind of treatments that are coming out to help with this, but this is just to show how complex and dynamic our brains are. Our brains, our whole bodies, which are fearfully and wonderfully made in the image of God, and our deep need actually for connection with God in the midst of these anxieties.

[53:05] That's the mind. thirdly then, the soul. To the soul we turn, which is distinct from the mind and the body.

Now, Christian theology has been influenced at certain times by Greek philosophy and what the soul is. It's interesting to kind of ask one another, how do you define soul? What is the soul? And it's really hard to get answers from people on that compared to the mind or the body or the strength. But the soul is really sometimes hard to kind of get a grasp on. Plato impacted the thought and doctrine of some saying that the soul was preexistent as pure mind.

It's influenced a lot of Christian thought around that. But, while distinct from the body, the soul is the immaterial person or self, which animates the body.

All this talk about anxiety and the effect and experience in the mind and body would be enough to make you think anxiety animates the mind and the body.

[54:14] Right? I'm talking about anxiety a lot. You think that that's actually what's giving you life. You actually know that that's not what's giving you life. But it's actually the soul that animates the person, including our heart, our mind, and our body.

Now, when you hear the word animation, you're thinking, I don't know, Disney or Mickey Mouse or something like that. Animation, which is a succession, you know, of photographs, photographic drawings.

Right? But animation is the state of a person or self that is full of life. The soul is created and a gift of God which makes us live and move and have our being.

No matter how much anxiety impacts our daily quality of life, as long as we have in our souls inhabiting bodies, life is in us. Anxiety seems to rob persons with perceived threats or dangers. Anxious thoughts of someone, a thing or a situation can really paralyze and push a person away. Some people become overwhelmed and think that they will die.

[ 55 : 32 ] It is that threatening sometimes. But the knowledge that to be human is to have a soul won't cure anxiety.

But it is important and maybe even inspiration to face perceived threats with this in mind. It's worth the reminder that our Lord's life was terminated when he gave up his spirit.

Spirit's just another word for soul which captures the origin of the person. Now when Jesus gave up his spirit on the cross his life ended no longer animated until his resurrection.

The agony and anxiety is finally dealt with then on the cross through the theology of atonement. I think with that I'm going to pass on strength and maybe come back to it but on your last page at the bottom I'm going to finish with this quote for now as it's related to what I was just saying about atonement.

This is a quote from Von Balthasar says about our human fear our humanity and anxiety says human fear and anxiety has been completely and definitively conquered by the cross.

[ 56 : 58 ] Anxiety is one of the authorities powers and dominions over which the Lord triumphed on the cross in which he carried off captive and placed in chains to make use of as he wills.

That's really really powerful. the effect of our Lord's death on the cross in the face of the anxiety that we experience that we express that we suffer and try to support with others that it's definitively dealt with by our Lord who experienced this separation the wrath of God on the cross in our place.

And that doesn't completely eliminate as we know anxiety in our life but von balthasar's comment at the end is quite a good reminder though that it was carried off captive and placed in chains to make use as he wills.

So I think God in his sovereignty and by his grace does use anxiety in our life even directly but indirectly as we support those who suffer with it too.

So let me stop there and entertain any questions you might have.