

The CORE TEACHINGS of JESUS

Hope and Trust in a World of Conflict

Rough Transcript

Brett Clemmer

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Well welcome. We're here at the Man in the Mirror Bible study. It's great to be with you today. And we're going to do another session in *The Core Teachings of Jesus*. And today, we are going to talk about finding **hope and trust in a world of conflict**. I was listening to a podcast this week, and it was fascinating. It was a brain researcher, and the brain researcher was talking about the different parts of your brain, right? Thank you. The different parts of your brain. And she talked about the prefrontal cortex and the limbic system. How many of you have ever heard of any of this? All right. Well, the other half of you will believe everything I say, that's great. So your limbic system; anybody know what your limbic system does? Fight or flight, right? Or, freeze, by the way. Fight, flight, or freeze. Your prefrontal cortex is where the rational thought happens.

So if you have a five-year-old, their prefrontal cortex doesn't work yet. You know this right? And so all they have is like these wild reactions on one side or the other; that's the limbic system. Unfortunately, the limbic system does not stop; so we all still, in our brains, we are all still, when we are confronted with something that is traumatic or that is stressful, if we're not paying attention, what happens is that limbic system kicks in. And so we either go into fight, flight, or freeze mode. Does this make sense? Does that sound familiar? So what happens when you are in a consistent state of the limbic system kicking in of, "Should I fight? Should I run? Or should I try to be really inconspicuous?" Right? That's anxiety, right? When this stress doesn't go away, when you're constantly having that system kicked off, and you're wondering, "What should you do?" That is anxiety.

And so, we live in a time right now, that is hitting our limbic system over and over again, isn't it? And so, a lot of us are living in a world of conflict in a world of... This last two years has been crazy. We've had obviously a health crisis. We've had a political crisis. We've had a race relations crisis, racial justice crisis. We've had an economic crisis. And so, if you are not stressed out right now, you are either a super Christian, or you're just psychopathic or something. We're all living in a world that is just heaping anxiety on us. And so, we want to talk about today, "In a world of conflict that's cost constantly causing us anxiety, how do we cope with that? And what does the Bible say?"

WHAT ARE YOU AFRAID OF?

So this is our world, right? So let me ask you this question. "What are you afraid of? What is stressing you out right now?" Maybe you're worried about COVID. You should be worried about COVID. You may have loved ones that have been sick, or that you've lost. You may have a big event coming up, like Keith; we just heard Keith has a wedding coming up, got to worry about those things. Man in the Mirror has a big event coming up in November; got to worry about those things. It causes stress. It causes anxiety. Maybe it's your family.

Because here's the thing; when COVID came, the other problems didn't go away. Right? So we all had... Or not all of us, but many of us had family stresses that we were dealing with before COVID came. We're still dealing with those family stresses. In fact, if anything, those stresses may have gotten worse. We may have issues with our health that aren't related to COVID, right? Last I heard, cancer didn't go away.

Right? All the other issues that people face; they didn't go away. People are still dying of other things. And so you've got health stress going on. Maybe you're worried about your job, or just about your income, your provision. You're looking at the bank account, and you're looking at the bills, and you're wondering how you're going to make it at the end of the month.

And so all of these things are continuing to cause us stress. "So what are you afraid of? What is causing you anxiety as you're sitting here this morning, or you're watching, or listening online? What are those things that are bringing you stress this morning?"

Now I've heard a lot of talks, Bible studies, sermons, on anxiety. And here's what I often hear; "Stop it. Just stop being anxious." Right? "You must not trust God if you're anxious." Right? How many people find that helpful? There are no hands up in here. One hand up in here, Vlad likes people telling him what to do. Everybody else is like, "If it was that easy." Right?

My wife has a beautiful voice and stage fright. So she has this beautiful voice, and I love hearing her sing. And I'll never forget when we were first married, she did a trio; she was singing in a trio. She's going to kill me for telling this story. She was in a trio at church, and she got up to sing; and they had practiced, and I had listened to the practices, and they were wonderful. And she got up to practice, and she didn't sing her best. I won't get into specifics, but it just wasn't her best. So we were talking about it after the service, and my mom was standing there, who I love dearly. But she said one of those mom things. So my wife says, "I don't know what happened. I just got up there, and I was so nervous." And my mom looks at her and with all sincerity says, "Well, just don't be nervous." Right?

And I think a lot of times when we talk in the church, when we talk among Christians about anxiety, that's sort of almost the bottom line. "Well, just don't be anxious. Just don't be anxious." And I don't think that's helpful. So let's talk this morning about worry and anxiety. And let's talk about it from the standpoint of, "Well, how can we actually deal with them? What are some strategies that we can use to overcome our anxiety?" And when I say overcome, I don't want to put a false promise out here. I'm not saying it's going to go away.

All right. So when we're talking about dealing with anxiety, I don't want to promise you the anxiety is going to go away. In fact, I'm going to promise you that your anxiety is not going to go away. Okay? Because those stresses are still there. But the way that we interact with that anxiety, the way that we deal with it; we can biblically, we can, from the Bible, find great strategies to live with that anxiety, and not allow it to limit our lives.

WORRY DOESN'T WORK

So the first thing I want to tell you is that worry doesn't work. Okay? Worry doesn't work. And what I mean by that is, our goal is for our anxiety to go away, right? Our goal is to not be anxious. So I know this is going to sound pretty elementary, but being anxious doesn't make you less anxious. Being worried doesn't make you less worried. It's not like there's a worry quotient; and once I've worried enough, all the worry goes away. Right? In fact, worry tends to do what? Compound itself. Right? Worry causes more worry.

So how do we stop that cycle that we get into? Worry doesn't work. So let's look at some passages. Let me give you one. I don't even have the... Literally, I was listening to the Psalms this morning, and these verses came up. So we're going to say that this is from the Holy Spirit.

So turn in your Bible to Psalm 106: 24 and 25. So Psalm 106 is the story of the Israelites escaping Egypt, and everything that happened in the wilderness. And so, you may remember that the Israelites were not particularly an easy people for Moses to lead, right? They weren't always like, "All right. This is just an adventure. Yay." They were out in the wilderness, they come to the Red Sea. "Thanks, Moses. Now Pharaoh is going to kill us against the Red Sea. They marched through the Red Sea. They marched through the Red Sea. Like that would be enough for me. Right? I would like to say that. But a few weeks,

or months later, you're still wandering around the wilderness; the Red Sea was a little while ago. "Maybe it was just a wind. Maybe it was a bad, I don't know. Maybe I don't really remember it right." But they kept forgetting what God had done for them.

And then they get to the Promised Land. Right? The spies go into the Promised Land. They see really, really healthy people; tall people. They see huge grapes and fruit and vegetables; it's the land of milk and honey. And basically, they have an identity crisis, and they forget who their God is. And so, in a Psalm 106:24, it says, "Then they despised the pleasant land, having no faith in His promise. They murmured in their tents, and did not obey the voice of the Lord. Therefore, He raised His hand and swore to them that He would make them fall in the wilderness, and would make their offspring fall among the nations, scattering them among the lands"

So the Israelites, after all that God had done for them, they forgot. They consistently forgot who they were. And in the end, their worry didn't work. It cost them the very promise that God had given them. They got within a river, crossing a river, basically, of getting into the Promised Land. And they gave it up, because they were anxious, because they were scared, and they didn't trust God.

Worry doesn't work. It keeps you from getting God's promises. Turn over to Matthew 6. And let's look at the Sermon on the Mount. We're going to look at what Jesus said, and we're going to look at Matthew 6 and Matthew 7 here, eventually. But Matthew 6:25-34; and I've got a few verses in the slides, but you'll want to pull it up in your own Bible.

Matthew 6:25 says, "Therefore, I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air. They neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns. And yet your Heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you, by being anxious, can add a single hour to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing?"

"Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow. They neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you? Oh, you of little faith. Therefore, do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat? Or what shall we drink? Or what shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your Heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Therefore, do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble."

So Jesus is saying here, if you are sort of sitting and stewing in your anxiety; if you're worried about everything that you don't have, you're not exercising your faith. You're not remembering that we worship a God that has promised to take care of us. And so when you sit and stew in your anxiety, you basically cut yourself off from the hope and the promises of God. And so this is sort of the.... We talked about fight, flight, or freeze; this is the freeze. Jesus is talking about the freeze. When you're sitting and stewing in your anxiety, you're frozen. You're not moving, you're not solving your problems; you're just obsessing about them.

So does fleeing work? If freezing doesn't work, does fleeing work? Well, it didn't work for Adam in the garden, right? First time he faced his own mistakes. What does he do? He flees. He goes and hides. And a lot of us do this. In fact, what a lot of us do when we face anxiety is we flee and then freeze. So we sort of isolate, and then we stop and stand really still, and hope that nobody can find us. And then in the meantime, what are we doing? We're just stewing. We're just obsessing about the things that we have to be anxious about.

Abraham and Sarah; when Abraham is traipsing through the wilderness, being obedient, going where God told him to do. But every time he ran into somebody that he was scared of, he gave him his wife.

Right? How crazy is that? But that's fleeing. That's fleeing from his responsibility, and just hoping that everything's going to be okay; but it's fleeing.

So does fighting work? So we had freezing doesn't work, fleeing doesn't work. Does fighting work? It didn't work too well for Samson. At the end, God was glorified. God got the glory in the end, but it killed Samson. Right? Peter, in the garden; look, I don't know about you, but of all the guys in the garden, if I had to choose, I would have wanted to be Peter. Right? Certainly not the naked boy in Mark, who runs away. They grab his... I don't want to be that guy. Right? And the other guys, it says, "They all fled." But at least Peter pulled a sword out and took a swing at somebody first. I would want to be that guy. But Jesus says, "No, that's not what you need to do here." And fighting is not going to help you.

So if we're not going to fight, we're not going to flee, we're not going to freeze. What are we going to do? We're going to remember the promises of God. We're going to remember the Israelites forgot God the promise of God; and so when they got right to the precipice of what He had promised them, their anxiety held them back. Abraham going through the desert; he knows he's being obedient, but he's just... As soon as he hits some adversity, he forgets God's promise. He stops trusting in God's promises.

THE ANTIDOTE TO WORRY

And so, the antidote to worry, then; the antidote to worry is to move. Sorry, is to move. So here's our **Big Idea**. "**When I'm anxious, I will move towards God, not sit and stew in my worries.** When I'm anxious, I will move towards God, not sit and stew in my worries." So let's look at some verses; Psalm 55:22 says, "Cast your burden on the Lord, and He will sustain you. He will never permit the righteous to be moved."

1 Peter 5:7; Peter's kind of quoting Psalms here, in a way. He says, "Cast all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you. Cast all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you."

And then, Paul says to Timothy, "For God gave us a spirit not of fear, but of power and love and self-control." Do you notice all of these things? Cast your burdens onto Jesus. Love and self control and power. These are all active words, okay? They're not combative, they're not fighting; but they're not fleeing or freezing, either. They're moving towards God. So when we're anxious, the answer is to move towards God.

Look what Jesus says just a few verses later. So He's talked about worry. He's talked about, "Don't worry about what you're going to wear or what you're going to eat, or where are you going to go." And it's just a few verses later. He says in Matthew 7, He says this; and I'm going to go all the way to verse 11. "Ask, and it will be given to you. Seek, and you will find. Knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives. And the one who seeks, finds. And to the one who knocks, it will be opened. For which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone. If he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent. If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children..." Listen to this guys. "How much more will your Father, who is in Heaven, give good things to those who ask Him?"

When we are anxious, the solution to our anxiety is not to stop being anxious; because it doesn't work that way. The solution to our anxiety is to move towards God; to ask God to give us good things, to trust in His promises. And when we sit and stew in our anxiety, it doesn't help us. It doesn't solve our problems, and makes things worse. And the worst part of it is, when you forget the promises of God, you cut yourself off from them.

Now, here's the good news. Okay? Here's the really good news. God is merciful; and He will not allow your lack of faith to hinder Him from doing what He wants to do in your life. All right? So I want to be very clear. So if you deal with your anxiety poorly, God is not waiting, God is not up there with a report card, going, "Aw, man, you got a C minus. I'm not going to be as good to you this week as I would have been if you had gotten an A." That's not how God works.

Moving towards God is not so that God is pleased with you, or not so that God is happy with you. It's just because it's better for you. It's how you were made. We were made to be as close to God as we can get; to walk in His will, to be aware of the work of His spirit in our lives, in our minds, in our hearts, in our souls. Right? So this is not a performance. This is not trading, "Don't be anxious" to, "Do more quiet time." Okay? You need to pray more. You do need to pray more; but that's not... It's not a performance thing.

God wants us to pray, because He wants us to be close to Him, because it's good for us; because He loves us, and He wants us to feel His closeness. And the more we feel His closeness, the more we pursue Him, the better we'll be able to deal with the anxieties that we have in our life. That's how God designed us.

So, think about this, from this verse; "When I am anxious, I'll ask for help. I'll seek the answers. And I'll pursue relationship." That's the knock, right? "I'll ask for help. I'll seek the answers. And I'll pursue relationship." What are all of these? Ask, seek, pursue, knock. They're action words. Okay? They're action words; but they're action towards God. So here's our Big Idea. **"When I'm anxious, I will move towards God, rather than sit and stew in my worries."**

Let's pray. "Well, Lord, all of us have anxieties. All of us are worried about family and jobs and health and our neighbors and our community, our nation, our world. Lord, there is a lot going on that is difficult, that worries us, that stirs us, Lord. And it should, because we are people who you've created with emotions and desires, and vision for how things should be. And Lord, when we see those things that are thwarting that vision that you've given us for how the world should be, it causes us distress."

"But Lord, you have given us great promises. You promise to be with us. You promise not to cast aside your righteous people. And Lord, we're not righteous, except that we are because of Jesus. You made us righteous through the righteousness of Jesus, Lord. So that means that you will not cast us aside. Because when you see us, you see a righteous man; not our righteousness, but Christ's righteousness, which is perfect."

"So Lord, we're so grateful for that. So would you draw us towards you, Lord? Would you help us not to sit and stew, not to flee and isolate and freeze, and not to get angry and lash out. But instead, Lord, would you help us to move towards you. That the rest we take would be resting in your promises, resting in your love, resting in your mercy."

"And Lord, we acknowledge that we're not going to do it perfectly. Sometimes we're not going to do it well at all; but in your mercy and your kindness and your love for us, even if we don't pursue you, you will always pursue us. Lord, open our eyes; open our eyes to the love that you have for us, so that as we deal with our anxieties, we're not doing it alone, but we're doing it through the power of your Holy Spirit. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.