

I. The Series Introduction

A. Let's get right into the Bible:

1. *"On the same day, when evening had come, He said to them, 'Let us cross over to the other side.' Now when they had left the multitude, they took Him along in the boat as He was. And other little boats were also with Him. And a great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that it was already filling. But He was in the stern, asleep on a pillow. And they awoke Him and said to Him, 'Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?' Then He arose and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, 'Peace, be still!' And the wind ceased and there was a great calm. But He said to them, 'Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?' And they feared exceedingly, and said to one another, 'Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him!'"* (Mark 4:35-41)

B. A recent headline says this:

1. Age of Anxiety: America seems to be in the midst of a full-blown panic attack. Is there anything we can do about it?

C. Recent surveys and studies from 2024–2025 confirm that anxiety remains a widespread concern across the United States, particularly among younger adults and adolescents.

1. In other words, if you're worried a lot, you're not alone.

II. Series Intro

A. Welcome to a new series called Anxiety Detox.

B. My talk today is Part 1:

**1. What is Anxiety?**

C. Before I get into it, I want to make a disclaimer.

1. Some Anxiety can have medical, physiological, or psychological causes. These would include panic attacks and other serious disorders, struggles that are really disruptive to a person's life.
2. I am not going to talk directly about this clinical level of anxiety disorders. I encourage you to seek medical help and Christian counseling professionals for this. This may involve medication. Definitely prayer... even deliverance prayer (we have a ministry for this). Nutrition, sleep, rest, exercise, and love.
  - a) Whatever you struggle with, own it. Get the help you need. Pathway Church will support you in that. But in all that you do, you still need to make Jesus and the Word of God your foundation in all of it.
3. In this series I am talking about anxiety that crops up in all the concerns of everyday life. Especially when anxieties grow large enough to negatively affect everyday functions and relationships.
4. So let's get into...

III. What is Anxiety?

**A. Human beings have a remarkable ability to run mental simulations of future events.**

1. This is a good thing. It lets you plan. It lets you anticipate the beautiful things in your future.
2. But it can be an emotionally disruptive thing:
  - a) Because when those mental simulations of tomorrow take a dark turn, that's when troubles begin today.
  - b) Which is why Jesus said, *"Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble."* (Matthew 6:34)
3. When God made you, he gave you this superpower called Imagination.
  - a) It's like having a movie producer inside your own head. You're sitting in a giant movie theater, an immersive experience, and you're watching your future story unfold of how things are going to go.
  - b) Your future self is the star of the movie. It's either going to be an epic adventure with a happy ending showing the nobility of the humble hobbits, or an epic catastrophe with Sauron and his army of orcs taking over the world.
4. What kind of movie were the disciples running when Jesus took them on a boat at sea.
5. While Jesus slept peacefully, they were running an internal movie: 'The waves are getting higher... the boat is filling... we are going down... and Jesus doesn't even care.. we're dying.'
  - a) Their future selves were leading actors in a disaster film.
  - b) God meant for imagination to be a gift to you. He meant it to be a source of pleasure. It's the source of creativity and all the beauty in the world.
  - c) But the imagination is also a source of worry, and that's what we're talking about.

**B. Worry is chain reaction of thinking that's taken a turn down a dark path.**

1. I have an awesome nephew named Joe. When he was in fifth grade, he wrote a story called, The Dog Ate My Homework. From that little event, it was a chain reaction.
  - a) Because the dog ate his homework, his teacher got mad.
  - b) Because his teacher got mad, she called his parents.
  - c) Because she called his parents, they missed a day at work.
  - d) Because they missed a day at work, the power plant had problems.
  - e) Because the power plant had problems... well you get the chain reaction idea...
  - f) The story ends with the whole world blowing up, all because the dog ate his homework.
    - (1) His teacher forgave him for all his missed homework.
2. This is called *Catastrophizing*. I like the word *Horriblizing*.
3. This is what happens when the movie you're making in your head takes a dark turn... and everything spirals into the worst-case scenario.
  - a) This is what happened when God brought his people to the promised land. God gave them this land for their blessing. God also promised to drive out the really chaotic and depraved cultures that were occupying their ancestral land.
  - b) When they got there, God's people sent in 12 spies to do recon.

- c) Two spies said that the land was incredible and beautiful, and yes, there are enemies in the land, but God will help us drive them out, let's go.
- d) Tens spies said that the land was incredible and beautiful, and the enemies in the land were giants that make all of us look like grasshoppers by comparison and if we try to take that land we're doomed... and that story ends like this:
  - (1) *"So all the congregation lifted up their voices and cried, and the people wept that night. And all the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron, and the whole congregation said to them, 'If only we had died in the land of Egypt! Or if only we had died in this wilderness! Why has the LORD brought us to this land to fall by the sword, that our wives and children should become victims? Would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?'"* (Numbers 14:1-3)
  - (2) The spies' catastrophizing is a classic example.
  - (3) And the disciples in the boat showed the same chain reaction in real time.
    - (a) One wave led to another in their minds until the only logical conclusion was, 'We are perishing.'
- 4. If you've ever known a chain smoker, they can smoke a whole pack with one match, because one cigarette lights the next.
- 5. So it is with anxiety. One thought lights the next thought which lights the next and they keep getting bigger, and darker, and "horribler"... until everybody hates you and even God has forsaken you, and everything precious to you is in ashes.
- 6. So goes the anxious imagination.
- 7. You can view worry as a chain reaction of future thinking that's taken a turn down a dark path.
  - a) Make sense?
- 8. Now let's add another feature to understand what anxiety is.
- C. Worry is a chain reaction of LOGICAL thinking that's taken a turn down a dark path.**
  - 1. What makes worry/anxiety so powerful is that it's logical. There's an internal logic to the whole thing. You can make a case that your worries are real.
    - a) I want to stand before you with all my care and love for you today and say that your anxiety makes sense to me. I don't shame you for it. It may be the only thing keeping you alive, or at least safe. I honor you for being willing to relook at these things from a biblical perspective.
    - b) That's why Joe's story about his homework worked. That's why the "If You Give a Mouse a Cookie" series of books works. There's an internal logic to it. You can't deny the logic.
      - (1) Someone says, yeah, but it's crazy.
      - (2) And you can always say, I know, but it's *possible*...!
  - 2. And it is the fact of this logic that explains why you can't use logic to talk person out of anxiety.
    - a) Have you ever tried? I think we all have. It never works.
  - 3. For most people, the logic of their own anxiety is airtight.
    - a) *"There is a way that seems right to a person, But its end is the way of death."* (Proverbs 14:12)
  - 4. To the disciples, their fear made perfect sense. A violent storm, a small boat, no life jackets, and their leader asleep—every fact lined up. The story, as they told it, ended in death. Their logic was airtight.
  - 5. Yet Jesus later asked, 'Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?' (Mark 4:40)."
    - a) And nobody died.
  - 6. But in the middle of it, it makes perfect sense.
    - a) It feels logical. It follows a coherent chain of thought. But it just might be missing the most important logic of all!
    - b) Yet Scripture reveals that this genuinely logical path ultimately ends in nothing but spiritual dead-ends.
- D. Worry is a chain reaction of LOGICAL thinking that's taken a turn down a dark path and over time becomes HABITUATED.**
  - 1. You get stuck in this rut. You gain momentum in this rut. And because you keep tracking through this rut, over time it becomes so deep that you can't see your way out of it.
    - a) If you play a musical instrument, you've habituated your scales. If you play a sport, you've habituated your footwork. You run the drills again and again till you can do it with your eyes shut.
    - b) You do that through repetition."
    - c) You run the drills again and again till you can run them with your eyes shut.
    - d) And now running them is habituated. It's got its own momentum inside you.
    - e) You've created mental pathways. You've created emotional pathways. You've created neurological pathways. You've created physiological pathways.
  - 2. These are pathways of thinking, of feeling, of reasoning, and of acting that are so strong you easily slip into them... AND...
    - a) AND... you make it look easy...
    - b) AND... they become hard to change...
    - c) AND... they become your new normal...
    - d) AND... they become invisible to you.
- E.** When you habituate something healthy and true and productive, it's awesome.
  - 1. But when you habituate something negative, it's painful. It's disruptive. You feel stuck. You begin to lose hope. Every day becomes a fight.
- F.** The disciples had watched Jesus heal the sick and cast out demons. They knew he could do miracles.
- G.** But when that storm came, they slipped instantly into their old rut of fear. Their anxiety had become habituated. It felt normal. It felt protective. It had become their default response—until Jesus spoke peace to the wind and the waves.
  - 1. Now, you are dealing with something the Bible calls a Stronghold.

2. **STRONGHOLD: A deeply habituated pattern of thinking, feeling, and acting that is self-harming yet feels normal and that comes from you yet is energized by the powers of darkness.**
3. If you've got long term negative patterns you just can't get over, then look here.
- H. But the good news is that strongholds can be overcome:
  1. *"For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ."* (2 Corinthians 10:4-5)
  2. I am saying that if you have any kind of stronghold... discouragement, or lust, or cruelty, or anger, or the one we're focusing on today, ANXIETY—whatever it is, you can rise above it.
    - a) You can overcome it.
    - b) You can dismantle it.
    - c) You can cast it down.
    - d) You can be free of it.
    - e) You can triumph over it.
    - f) You don't have to accept it.
    - g) You don't have to deny it.
    - h) You don't have to live with it forever.
    - i) You can create a future self where the stronghold is just a dim memory.
  3. Because however strong your mental chain reaction is, there is a greater power, an alternative power, and it is stronger still.
  4. That is precisely what happened in the boat. The storm was real. The fear was logical. The rut of anxiety was deep. Yet when the disciples finally turned to Jesus, He spoke, and the wind and sea obeyed.
  5. The same Jesus who calmed that storm is present with you in every storm you face today. He is not asleep to your anxiety—He is ready to speak peace.

#### IV. Transition

- A. If you've ever driven in Europe, or in an American city that has suddenly decided they love traffic circles, you know the panic of a multi-lane roundabout.
- B. In the classic comedy National Lampoon's European Vacation, Clark Griswold gets his family trapped in a massive London roundabout. He can't figure out how to merge out, so he just keeps driving in a circle for hours.
- C. Every time they pass the same landmark, he enthusiastically points and yells, "Look kids, Big Ben! Parliament!" He is driving. He is burning gas. His hands are on the wheel.
- D. But he is going absolutely nowhere.
- E. That is what an anxiety stronghold feels like. Your mind is racing, your heart is pumping, and you feel like you are actively "working" on the problem because you're worrying about it.
- F. But you're just trapped in a mental roundabout. You're passing the same dark thoughts over and over—"Look, bankruptcy! Look, loneliness! Look, failure!" At some point, you have to grip the steering wheel, endure the discomfort of changing lanes, and force your mind to take the exit.
  1. So let's start talking about the exit. Are you good with that?

#### V. A New Kind of Chain

- A. A chain can either protect you or shackle you.
  1. Chains of WORRY shackle you.
  2. Chains of HOPE protect you.
- B. In Anxiety Detox, I want to help you create a parallel chain.
- C. I'm not going to tell you to break the anxiety chain, not yet. My sermon today isn't, 'hey stop worrying.'
- D. When I grew up in church, the way they tried to get us to handle worry was by telling us that worry is a sin. So now, I'm not just worried about the thing I'm worried about, I'm worried about the worry about the thing I'm worried about.
- E. The deeper you go into theology, the more you discover God is more about **DISPLACING ERROR WITH TRUTH** than he is about just telling you to stop it.
- F. So, this may surprise you.
  1. My pastoral counsel to you today is to let that **THE CHAIN OF WORRY** keep on going.
  2. It's not like you're going to just turn it off anyway.
- G. At the same time, start forging a parallel chain: **THE CHAIN OF HOPE**.
  1. If you are going to forge a new chain—a Chain of Hope—you cannot just wish for it. We have to build it, link by link. We have to install a new operating system in your mind.
  2. Here is how you do it.
    - a) It takes three things: The Blueprint, The Anchor, and The Daily Rep.

#### VI. Forging a Worry Free Mind

- A. **The Blueprint: You have to reject the world's algorithm.**
  - a) *"And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."* (Romans 12:2)
  2. The world operates on an algorithm of panic. The news, the culture, the economy—they are all designed to keep you clicking, keep you scared, and keep you trapped in the roundabout.
  3. If you passively consume the world's inputs, you will inevitably produce the world's output: Anxiety.
  4. "Do not be conformed."

5. Stop letting your peer group code your imagination.
6. Instead, you must be "transformed by the renewing of your mind." You have to consciously choose a new blueprint. You have to decide that you are no longer going to let the disaster movie play unchallenged in your head.

**B. The Anchor: You must lock your attention onto a permanent mental target.**

- a) *"You will keep him in perfect peace, Whose mind is stayed on You, Because he trusts in You."* (Isaiah 26:3)
2. Notice the word stayed. It means fixed, locked, bolted down.
3. When the disciples were in the boat, their minds were stayed on the waves. They were calculating the wind speed and the water level. Their focus was locked on the chaos, and so their internal world became chaotic.
4. Peace is not the absence of a storm; peace is a mind stayed on the only One who controls the storm.
5. When you feel the chain reaction of worry starting—"the dog ate my homework, so my life is over"—you don't just tell yourself to stop worrying.
6. You immediately force your attention onto the Anchor. You shift your gaze to the character of God, the promises of God, and the presence of Jesus in your boat.

- a) What you focus on, you fuel.

**C. The Daily Reps: you have to out-hustle your opponent.**

1. If a team wants to win ball games, they have to out hustle their opponents.
2. If you want to stand in peace, you have to out hustle your opponent: anxiety.
- a) *"This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success."* (Joshua 1:8)
3. You habituated your anxiety through thousands of tiny repetitions. You practiced worrying until you became a master at it. Now, you have to practice truth until it becomes your new default.

**D. ...And the funny thing is, this will happen faster than you think it will.**

1. But here is the catch. You can't just practice truth when you feel like it. You need a system.
2. Look at that word in Joshua 1:8. The Bible calls this system meditation.
3. But let me tell you right now: biblical meditation is not sitting in a quiet room, listening to a waterfall, and trying to empty your mind.
4. It is the exact opposite. It is an aggressive, tactical weapon. It is not about emptying your mind; it is about relentlessly filling it.
5. So how do you actually do that? How do you take a mind that is addicted to catastrophizing and rehab it to default to hope?

**E. That is exactly what we are going to build next week in Part 2.**

1. We are going to take the theology of peace and turn it into a daily, executable protocol. If you are tired of driving in circles in the roundabout of panic, do not miss next week. We will be building the exit ramp.

**VII. Prayer**

- A. Father, I come to you right now for every single person in this room.
- B. I pray for the men and women here who are exhausted from fighting their own imagination. I know that the storms they are facing are real. The waves are high, the logic of their fear makes perfect sense to them, and for some, it feels like the boat is going down.
- C. But I thank You that You are in the boat. You are not asleep to their pain. You are not deaf to their cries.
- D. I ask right now that You would break the mesmerizing power of the disaster movies playing in their minds. I pray that this week, You would give them a holy disruption. When that chain reaction of worry begins, I ask that Your Holy Spirit would immediately prompt them. Give them the courage to grip the steering wheel, look at the Anchor, and remember exactly who is in the boat with them.
- E. I do not ask You to remove every storm this week. I ask You to give them a peace that defies the storm's logic.
- F. I pray against the stronghold of anxiety. I ask that the deep ruts of fear would begin to lose their grip today. Protect their minds. Give them absolute clarity for the mission this week. I declare that the Chain of Hope starts right now.
- G. In the mighty and storm-calming name of Jesus, I pray.
- H. Amen.