

HE GETS US
Part One: Anxiety
Pastor Rick Henderson **April 15-16, 2023**

Before I kick off our new message series, I want to share a few updates and speak from my heart a little bit. Last weekend was one of my favorite Easter weekends in a long time. I think Pastor Caleb gave the best Good Friday sermon I've ever heard. It was truly worshipful for me. Our attendance at the Good Friday service was triple digits higher than last year.

GOOD FRIDAY: 617

I'm so grateful for those who got to be a part of that service. There was an army of volunteers who made the entire Easter weekend happen. Kids Ministry, Guest Services, the Kitchen team, and all the volunteers who put in hours of prep to for worship and tech. Can we express our appreciation to them. How many times have you heard me say this?

Leadership is a **DESTINATION** of discipleship.

Thank you for using the resources you have, the skills you have, the gifting you have to join together in leading others to take a step toward Jesus or their next step with Jesus. There were over 2400 at our Easter services.

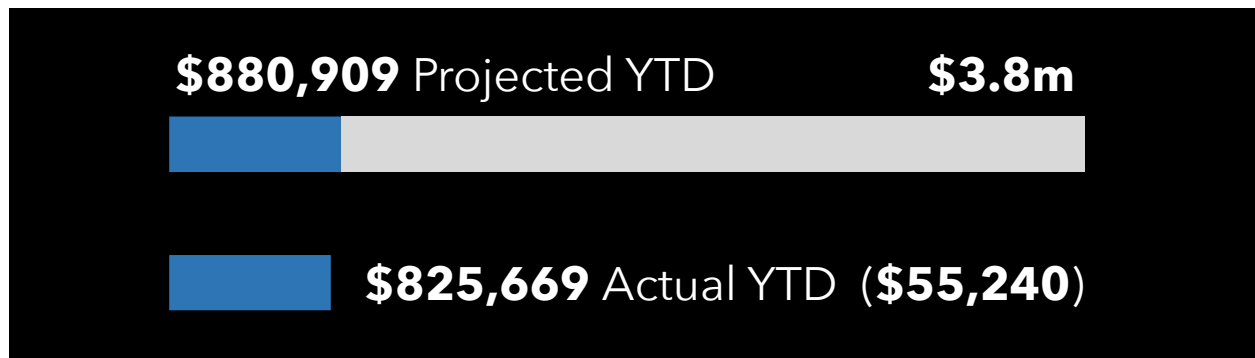
EASTER: 2426

Something I appreciate is how many of you chose to attend the 11:15am service. For the first time in a long time, attendance was spread out evenly over the three services. That means that people did not have to sit in an overflow space. That is such a big deal, because it's a far better experience to actually have a seat in this room. I know that a lot of you chose the 11:15am service even though it wasn't your first choice. By you doing that, you were living out one of our values.

HONOR guests enthusiastically.

- We care more about your experience than our own.

As your pastor, I'm proud and I'm grateful. Thank you. We're also in the second quarter of the year, so let me give you a quick financial update.



We are behind where we expected to be. It's not a huge gap, but it is a gap. Today is not going to be a message about giving. This is an update. Churches are crowd-funded organizations. For those of you who give, THANK YOU. For those of you who consider this to be your church and your people, and that's not a step that you've taken yet, I want to invite you to be a ministry partner with us by giving financially.

I don't know how much people give. I'm not interested in knowing that. When someone gives for the first time, I don't know amounts, I'm given their names. So, I write a card of gratitude to each person. If you've received a card like that from me, if you can read my writing, you've read from me how much I appreciate your partnership in this ministry.

My favorite cards to write are to kids in our church. When they give for the first time, they get a handwritten card from me too. I've learned that I can't use cursive. One little girl in our church recently told me, "Pastor Rick, I got your card, but I don't read cursive." Lesson learned.

Let's pivot now to the new message series. What you see on the screen will help us make that transition.

[ANXIETY VIDEO]

When you see that, I'm more than just curious about how you respond. I'm fascinated by the way that people respond, by the way that you respond to that. I know that reactions fall on a broad spectrum. Some are surprised by the idea of Jesus truly experiencing anxiety. Some of us are comforted by it. Some of us might even feel offended by the idea. Is it true that Jesus suffered anxiety? Whatever that answer is, why is relevant to you, right now, right here, today?

HEBREWS 4:15-16 *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*

One of the reasons that your heavenly father wants you to be confident is Jesus actually experienced our weaknesses, our vulnerabilities. Fully God and fully human at the same, Jesus fully experienced our weaknesses too. If you're still not convinced. In the hours before being arrested, and then crucified, Jesus wanted his friends to pray with him. This is how Luke described that moment.

LUKE 22:44 *And being in **anguish**, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.*

This word in Greek is **αγωνια**. It's where we get our word agony. It literally means *anguish* or *anxiety*. Matthew is there in this moment. He wrote down what Jesus said that night.

MATTHEW 26:38a *Then he said to them, "My soul is **overwhelmed with sorrow** to the point of death..."*

When Jesus talks about anxiety he is both the authority and an insider. He gets it. He gets us. Jesus felt anguish and anxiety. And yet, that never turned into worry for him. You can decide for yourself. But I think he should get our full attention and get our trust. I'm asking you to get real with me in a hurry today. Would you agree with me that we need truth—life-giving truth? Would you agree with me that we need grace? Would you agree with me that we need healing and freedom?

You know all the stats as I do. In the past few years, we've seen all-time highs in:

- Depression
- Divorce
- Suicide
- Crime
- Substance Abuse

I'm not a doctor, I'm a pastor. There are medical and clinical conditions that need medical treatment. This message is not at all intended to be a replacement for that. We are going to talk about the real and universal human experience of anxiety, and we're going to talk about worry. Anxiety is not the same thing as worry. Anxiety isn't wrong, but it makes us vulnerable to worry, which is sin. Jesus felt anxiety, but not worry.

I want to start by reading to you what Jesus had to say about this. Remember, he gets it. He gets us. If you want to pull out your phone and follow along, it's Matthew 6:25-34.

MATTHEW 6:25-34

If you want to read along with the Bible that's in the seat back, it's page 1509. Some of this will be on the screen later and we will break it down together. Right now, I'd love it if you could let yourself sit deeply in your chair, tune your ears and your mind to these life-giving words of Jesus.

MATTHEW 6:25-34 *"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life,*

I know that I risk being annoying by pointing this out every time. The word, therefore, is telling us that everything we are about to read is the application of truth that was just given. The thing that Jesus said right before this was, "You cannot serve both God and money."

Isn't the Bible irrelevant? Isn't it good to know that because of social evolution, we have advanced beyond getting worried about money? This is a tell-the-truth moment. How many of you have ever let yourself believe that if you could add a zero or two to the end of your bank account you'd be immune to worry?

do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?

I know we've got medical people in here. What are the medical benefits of worry and anxiety? We don't even have to be trained to know. We know. Not only are there no benefits. There are only consequences to our health.

"And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith?"

What do you believe? Do you believe that God is fundamentally grumpy, angry, and irritable? Or do you believe that he is fundamentally love? Do you know, and do you let yourself believe that he sees you, knows you, and cares about you? Jesus is saying that our answer should be yes.

So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Years ago, my wife gave me this photo as a gift. This is an actual WW2 fighter pilot. I love this photo. In between the missions and moments of chaos, he is calmly participating in the everyday stuff of life

How did he say so calm? Believe it or not, there is real psychology that explains it. Psychologists discovered something about the power of what we believe when they studied the effects of combat on soldiers during WW2.

After 60 days of combat, ground troops became emotionally dead. They stopped feeling. Compare that with fighter pilots. They had a much higher chance of being killed than ground troops, but they stayed far calmer. 93% of fighter pilots claimed to be happy, even though they had a 50% mortality rate. The difference that psychologists discovered was that fighter pilots felt like they had more control over their lives than the infantry soldiers felt that they had. Isn't that fascinating? Would you consider this?

There is a response to anxiety that's built on **DELUSION**. And there's a response to anxiety that's built on **REALITY**.

I want reality. How about you? The illusion or delusion of having control was a very real antidote for anxiety and worry. But it didn't make fighter pilots any safer. I think this is an important observation.

COUNTERFEIT SOLUTIONS FOR ANXIETY: Get **CONTROL** or give in to **APATHY**.

That's a very common spectrum. On this end stop caring and stop feeling. On this end control as much as you can. I think too many people are bouncing around on this spectrum. Maybe too many of us are bouncing around on this spectrum. The words of Jesus and the way of Jesus can't be found somewhere in the middle. He gives us something that is entirely different.

MATTHEW 6:32-33 *For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*

In the full context, Jesus referenced running after food and clothing. It's probably helpful for us to remember that in their day, getting food and getting clothing took a lot of time and energy. You didn't run an errand to get food. It was a lifestyle of hard work. Clothing took serious effort too. Most people didn't have outfits. They owned few items of clothing. What ties these things together is that food was always spoiling, being consumed, and needing to be replaced. Clothing was wearing out and needing to be replaced.

These were urgent, unrelenting, costly needs. If Jesus were having this conversation with us today, no doubt he would use different examples. I don't know for a fact, but if Jesus wanted to have this

conversation with us today, instead of food and clothing, he would talk about health care and careers. These are two things that dominate our thinking, require lots of our time, and impact our money.

People who know their heavenly Father, their lives are oriented differently. These things are important, but we don't chase after them to make our lives important. We are defined by and live for something that's more important. Jesus said something here that's easy to miss, but we absolutely can't miss it.

He is trying to get us to see and trust God as our heavenly Father. Before we can get to the practical, we need to dive into the theological. What is the significance of God being our heavenly Father for those who trust in Jesus Christ?

Heavenly Father means that God is simultaneously the ultimate **AUTHORITY** (sovereign) and immediately **PERSONAL** (dad).

It's important that we see both. It's urgent that comprehend both. I want to draw your attention to this word, *Dad*. When Jesus told us to think of God as Father, that was radical. It was revolutionary. Jesus pushed them to think of God as being closer, making him more immediate, more personal, and more intimate than they had ever conceived. It's tragic if that's ever lost on us.

I don't know about you, but I never use the term *father* in a personal way. Rather, it feels formal and distant. It's cold, not a warm, affectionate term. If we are going to truly connect with and understand what Jesus is saying, we should think Dad.

- Like a child who runs, jumps in his arms, and yells, *Dad*.
- Like a teenager who can barely get out the word, *Dad*, and then crumples into his arms, a tearful mess.
- Like two grown men sitting in the fishing boat; one looks over and warmly says, *Dad*.

All of that warmth and closeness and immediacy is what we should think. If you remember our Easter message last week. When Mary was hugging Jesus tightly after the resurrection, he said to her, "I have to return to my God and your God. I have to return to my father and your father."

I want to overcome anxiety. I want you to overcome anxiety. If you want that too, let's make sure we get exactly who our heavenly father is. That means we have to understand both this **[ultimate authority]** and this **[immediately personal]**. That means doing a little Theology 101 together. Let's start by getting clarity on God's sovereignty.

THEOLOGY 101: God's sovereignty means he's the ultimate authority, always in control, and perfectly manages all things.

I don't want to spend too much time on this, but leaning into this causes people to ask really good questions. They're not just good questions, they're thick, robust, profound questions. One of the entry-point, natural questions is this.

QUESTION: Does God being sovereign mean that God causes all things that happen?

The short answer is *no*.

THEOLOGY 101: Sovereignty means all things are under his **AUTHORITY**, not that all things are **DETERMINED**.

We've got to be clear on this. God is always in control. That does not mean that God is causing all things that happen. Yes, God does cause things to happen. He doesn't cause all things that happen. When I lose control of my anger—God didn't cause that. When you do something you regret—God didn't cause that. When a hurricane hits a city—unless God tells us that he intentionally caused it, we should not blame him for it.

THEOLOGY 101: Sovereignty is a complex tapestry of God causing events, allowing events, and not allowing events throughout history.

There are good-hearted, smart followers of Jesus who think differently than me on this. Maybe you think differently than me on this. If you are convinced that somehow, some way, behind it all—God is actually determining and decisively causing all things that happen—then you also must embrace what I'm about to say next.

Irony

Tension

Contradiction

I'll leave it up to you to decide if you think it's an irony, a tension, or a contradiction. But it's one of these three. If you believe that God determines all things then you have to believe that God determined for you to be here today, that God determined for me to be the pastor, and determined that I teach you that not all things are determined. Is that an irony, a tension, or is it a contradiction?

Let's keep this train going. God is sovereign, and you are free to make real and meaningful choices.

THEOLOGY 101: Human freedom means that you could have chosen **OTHERWISE**. It doesn't mean you can **OVERRIDE** God's sovereignty.

You could have chosen to sit in another seat. You could have chosen to wear different socks. In every decision you made today, yesterday, and all the days of your life leading up to this moment—you could have chosen differently. And yet, if God has sovereignly decided to cause something—there's nothing we can do to stop it. That's GOOD NEWS. And, if God has sovereignly decided not to allow something—there's nothing we can do to start it. That's GOOD NEWS.

Human freedom means that you could have made a different choice. Our choices are real. Our choices are meaningful. Our choices exist inside of a universe that was designed to operate according to a magisterially complex series of cause-and-effect relationships. Our choices come with benefits and consequences and outcomes of all sorts. This is why wisdom is so monumentally important. In the Old Testament and the New Testament, we are instructed over and over to think and act with wisdom. Have you ever noticed this verse before?

PROVERBS 19:3 *A person's own folly leads to their ruin, yet their heart rages against the LORD.*

Rahul Agarwal is a pastor and friend from seminary. I love how he summarizes this.

Never blame God's sovereignty for things that are actually the result of your irresponsibility. —Rahul Agarwal

I feel like we're at the point where we need some good news. For all the stupid, sinful, and regrettable choices in our lives—God is so loving and so powerful that he sovereignly works it all to align with grace. For all the hurts and calamity and injustice that's not our fault at all—God is so loving and so powerful that he sovereignly works it all to align with grace.

ROMANS 8:28 *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*

The difference between the people who experience this and the people who don't isn't that some are better people than others. It isn't that some make fewer mistakes than others. One person recognizes their moral mess-ups and sins and humbly repents and trusts in Jesus. The other type of person doesn't. That's the only difference between the person who experiences this and the person who doesn't. Which one are you?

MATTHEW 6:26,30 *"Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not **much more valuable** than they...If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, **will he not much more clothe you**—you of little faith?"*

When Jesus tells us to think of God as a heavenly Father, he isn't trying to make people feel nice. He isn't patronizing. This is a stunning declaration that should ripple through our lives like an earthquake. The realization of this should be like shockwaves, shaking us loose from worry and wrong thinking. The God above, beyond, and behind the universe is transcendent, powerful, authoritative AND, he is close like a loving dad. Would you let that settle on you today? I've got an observation that some of us really need to reckon with.

If you think your life is too insignificant to notice, it's not your view of **SELF**, but your view of **GOD** that's too small.

Would you be surprised if I told you that worry is not the absence of faith? Worry is misplaced faith. When you worry and when I worry, it's because we are trusting in something that we know might let us down.

MATTHEW 6:32-34 *For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore **do not worry** about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.*

Would you get real with me for a quick minute? What are you trusting? Do you remember what an idol is?

IDOLS: Anything, other than Jesus, that we look to for **SIGNIFICANCE**, **SECURITY**, and **SATISFACTION**.

We will feel anxiety in life. We will feel anguish in life. That is not wrong. Worry is a different story. Whenever a follower of Jesus feels worried, it's always an indicator, it always exposes that we are trusting something other than Jesus. Warren Wiersbe is one of my all-time favorite Bible teachers.

The person who pursues money thinks that riches will solve his problems., when in reality, riches will create more problems! Material wealth gives a dangerous, false sense of security, and that feeling ends in tragedy. The birds and lilies do not fret and worry; yet they have God's wealth in ways that man cannot duplicate. –Warren Wiersbe

You need the peace and joy and freedom that comes from trusting in your heavenly father who cares for you. He is sovereign. He is the ultimate authority who is always in control, perfectly managing all things. ***Do I have permission to be frank with you?***

You are never going to enjoy the freedom from anxiety and worry that he gives until you place yourself under his authority. That's part of what it means to seek his kingdom and his righteousness. Would you be willing to pray this prayer?

Dad, I trust you. Do whatever you think is best, in your timing and in your way. I know you've got my back. And I'm not backing off of that. I know that you love me. I choose to delight in and rest in however you decide to exercise your authority.

So, what are you supposed to do now? Once you get your thinking and your belief aligned with the truth that Jesus masterfully gives—what is it that comes next? Humbly placing ourselves under his authority always, always, always looks like obeying what read in his word.

WHEN FEELING ANXIETY

- Get honest in prayer. (1 Peter 5:7)
- Express gratitude specifically. (Philippians 4:6)
- Refuse to grumble. (Philippians 2:14-16)
- Get honest with other believers. (Galatians 6:2)
- Talk with a counselor. (Proverbs 19:20)

All of this is on the digital notes, which you can get on our website. These are printed out on the notes that you can pick up as you walk through the lobby. You have a heavenly Father who loves you. You have a Savior who proved he meant what he said by going to the cross, and he proved that his promises are true by rising from the dead. There is no doubt that he gets us, that he gets you. The question is, does he have your trust?