

Sermon on 1 Corinthians 7:25-40 prepared for Grace Church by Jonathan Shradar

Anxious in the church... The anxious bench and how it was a tool to convert those anxious about their souls and eternal states. Oh how time has evolved us... Concern after concern has been added to our realities... One weekend edition of the New York Times holds more information than the average person at the turn of the 19th century would have for their whole life. Many things to have an opinion, to prevent, to engage in. Then things outside of our immediate sphere, like elections... We have moved from having an anxious bench, to being an anxious bunch.

We worry all the time. Whether we label it that or even notice it... It slowly wrecks us and makes it impossible to grow, learn new things, be present in the moment, or enjoy time off - out of our routine. That is just those without a diagnosable condition.

Anxiety Disorders affect 18.1 percent of adults in the **United States** (approximately 40 million adults between the ages of 18 to 54). - National Institute of Mental Health. Approximately 30 percent of the adult population in North America have anxiety unwellness issues (anxiety disorder). Only one third will receive treatment, and of those, **only ten percent will receive proper treatment... More than half of college students sought help for their anxiety issues.** Research has found that anxiety can impede learning, which often leads to lower academic achievement and performance. 65% of North Americans take prescription medications daily, 43% take mood altering prescriptions regularly. Getting help is good and healthy - when emotions and hormones take us out of the game, we are free to pursue solutions - no shame in it.

From the first moments of anxiety in a garden long ago, when the first parents of humanity worried about being naked... something has been wrong. Something is wrong. Living under anxiety just doesn't feel right... and it is not - not what we are meant for.

Paul uses the church in Corinth's question on marriage and self-righteousness to speak a word about freedom from anxiety and in doing so we are beckoned to hear the words of our savior - who took on all of our anxiety and fear and promises us something better.

In a climate of distress and anxiety the Christian's hope is found in considering Jesus.

1 Corinthians 7:25-40

In chapter 7 Paul has taken on some of the questions that the church wrote to him about. There was an ascetic branch of the church that demanded a denial of anything that the world might pervert and they promoted gain through changing your situation. Paul's response calls them to live as they are, with a new perspective, that they belong to Jesus and the old priorities no longer matter much but living from the salvation they have been given is what matters now.

Then he turns to the engaged, those betrothed, set to be married and gives some practical cues to the church but also calls them out of anxiety, or a preoccupation with things that rob you of devotion to the Jesus. The solution seems to be a new perspective. That is how we will progress through the text today - Practicalities, Preoccupation, Perspective.

1) Practicalities

These verses are packed with answers to some big life questions. As a former young adults pastor, I know how relevant this text can be to us, especially when we are in a season of life facing the questions of whether we should pursue marriage or not.. And it has something for everybody. The single people can be super Christians and the married people can be cool too!

It would be to neglect the Scripture if we disregarded these practical words on those engaged or ripe for it.

Paul, as the Spirit inspired writer of God's Word here - trustworthy, tells the church that remaining as they are is good, specifically those not married, it is good to remain single. "In view of the present distress..." We don't know what specific distress he is mentioning or if it is the general distress of life as a believer.

But there is a sense that remaining single allows for a focus of the faith that is admirable, desirable. And we can understand that - the freedom that comes with this station of life. It is not only useful to be single but it might actually bring you joy! In verse 40 he says the women that remains a widow will be "happier if she remains as she is."

The practical good news is not only for the singles though. Paul also makes clear that marriage is not sin! Though it is not sinning, don't go into it naive, know that worldly trouble will come.

Self control is valuable when you are engaged... if you can keep that control maybe you don't need to be married - "you would do better" in verse 38. At the same time the help that marriage is in the realm of self control is good - you do well.

This commitment is not to be entered into lightly, as we have seen before, and it is actually meant to be a lifelong commitment. You are bound to your spouse as long as they live.

These are helpful, practical truths, and Paul gives them to us as one that has the Spirit of God - indwelt by the Spirit. We can take the practicalities to heart and if you find yourself asking similar questions, hear these answers and talk them out with your Grace Group, friends or elders...

Of course it would be a disservice if we neglected the call to singleness that is here, it would be I think a more significant miss if we skipped over Paul's desire to see the church freed from anxiety.

2) Preoccupation

7:32-34 “I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord. [33] But the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife, [34] and his interests are divided. And the unmarried or betrothed woman is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit. But the married woman is anxious about worldly things, how to please her husband.”

Paul’s goal is that the church, that believers would be free from anxiety... in all of its forms. We might read this text and think the comparison is meant to prove that being single is better because you only have to worry about pleasing God... Paul is saying I don’t want you to worry! “Free from anxieties,” free from concern - whether that is being anxious about your religious life or your married life. And about everything else... in verses 29-31 he talks not only of marriage, but of mourning, grieving, joy, purchasing, wealth and dealing with the world - covers just about everything in life.

It is being so preoccupied with other things that we miss devotion to Jesus, to the truth of our standing in him. We know what this looks like don’t we? This concern, worry, anxiety over the things of this noisy life, it is the low hum of our days and nights. It interrupts our moments of rest... our moments of creativity, our moments of celebration... it infects every moment.

For the married one they are preoccupied with the worldly troubles that keep seeming to dominate their relationship. They are preoccupied with what could be if they love or were loved just right... For the single person geared toward self-righteousness, they are occupied with worry over whether God is pleased with them, whether his grace is merely on loan, at any given moment.

For the parent, we can be preoccupied with protecting our children from all the troubles of life we experienced... For the child they can be preoccupied with earning their parents favor and being just successful enough that mom or dad would be proud of them...

For the middle-aged worker, they can be preoccupied with whether or not they have saved enough to retire. For the retiree they can be preoccupied with wondering if this is all there is? For the family with just enough to get by every month, they can be preoccupied with finding more income or worrying about how to pay for the big items coming down the road. You name it. You know your thing.

We sacrifice our present on the altar of the future when we are preoccupied, anxious about whatever it is we let dominate our mind, our emotions...

We can be honest, this is a safe place! Anxiety is normative - we need not hide the reality of it. Because we must be aware of its dangers.

“Anxiety is a condition of the heart that gives rise to many other sinful states of mind... Anxiety about finances can give rise to coveting and greed and hoarding and stealing. Anxiety about

succeeding at some task can make you irritable and abrupt and surly. Anxiety about relationships can make you withdrawn and indifferent and uncaring about other people. Anxiety about how someone will respond to you can make you cover over the truth and lie about things. So if anxiety could be conquered, a mortal blow would be struck to many other sins.” Piper

Paul does not want the church to be free of anxiety because he wants to lay a new burden or restraint on them, but to “promote good order and secure your undivided devotion to the Lord.” He proclaims freedom from anxieties because he wants the church to live, to be untethered in their responsiveness to God’s grace and gift of identity in Jesus.

Preoccupation/anxiety takes our eyes, and faith off of God’s provision and care for us. Slide into unbelief... “God really isn’t good enough...” we follow after things that itch our anxieties rather than declare the goodness of God.

Many of you know that I have high regard for my dog Jones. He is never far from me and he looks to me for approval and care - all of his needs really. But Jones is often distracted by his preoccupation - food. You can lure Jones away from his master with just about anything edible. I could be set to pet and affirm Jones, tell him what a good boy he is... and if someone drops a snack, off he goes.

Our preoccupations do the same thing - we might be looking to our king, close to our Savior, realizing the Good Fatherhood of God, and then wham - sausages! Off we go, away from our affirmation, the care and knowledge of God’s glorious sovereignty.

“When anxiety strikes and blurs our vision of God’s glory and the greatness of the future that he plans for us, this does not mean that we are faithless, or that we will not make it to heaven. It means our faith is being attacked. At first blow, our belief in God’s promises may sputter and swerve. But whether we stay on track and make it to the finish line depends on whether, by grace, we set in motion a process of resistance - whether we fight back against the unbelief of anxiety.” Piper, Future Grace

Paul’s hope is that we will fight the unbelief of anxiety, that we will get to undivided devotion through a new perspective.

3) Perspective

Look back at verses **29-31**. “This is what I mean, brothers: the appointed time has grown very short. From now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none, [30] and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no goods, [31] and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away.”

This is the Christian perspective that is formed from all of the truth Paul has proclaimed to this point. In Christ we can hold all these things loosely and cling to what matters rather than being preoccupied with lesser things. The time is short, the worry of this world is passing away, live from the cross and have a gospel perspective.

In this whole letter Paul counsels Christians always to live in the light of Christ's certain return...Paul's point here is simply that the **form of this world**, or its day-to-day affairs, is not eternal. Christians should prioritize their human relationships, material possessions, and worldly dealings accordingly.

You are free to have this perspective because of Christ and him crucified, the only thing Paul preaches among the churches...

“Ultimately, this chapter points to the incarnation of Christ, in which we see the perfect combination of involvement in the world without dependence on the world. Jesus lived a genuinely human life, bearing with all the difficulties and temptations of life in a fallen world. Yet he never let sinful priorities govern his mindset or lifestyle. His coming has broken the power of this world, so as we await his return, we too are able to live faithfully before God.”
Gospel Transformation Bible.

Paul says chill... don't freak out about these things.

Jesus gives us clues as to how we can avoid anxiety in this life. In teaching about not storing up treasure on earth but pursuing heavenly treasure, saying no one can serve two masters... He says this.

Matthew 6:25-34 “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? [26] 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? [27] And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? [28] And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, [29] yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. [30] 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, O you of little faith? [31] Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ [32] For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. [33] But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. [34] “Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.”

Consider the birds! In Escondido it is crows... in El Cajon it might be parrots! How God provides for them... not because they have been good little birds or because they earned it...but because they are his. Or the lilies of the field, they neither toil nor spin... and God arrays them in splendor. How much more valuable are you? So valuable in fact that Jesus would come to take your place... save you and secure your provision for all of eternity in him.

Don't be anxious, hold things loosely, and seek first the kingdom, God's call on your life, his mission, your worship of the king - and know the rest is taken care of. Live present in today, trusting Jesus. As practical as lues on being single are, looking up is practical help to us when we are anxious.

Not only can we consider the birds and the flowers in the field... we can consider Jesus.

Therefore, holy brothers and sisters, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, who was faithful to him who appointed him," and who is faithful to his promise to care for you and bring you all the way home. Look again upon your Savior and all that his "It is finished" entails.

"Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted." (Hebrews 12:3 ESV)

Paul wants us to be free from anxieties. Jesus took on the cross to free us from our anxieties. And what's more... what is so comforting, so anxiety shattering... we know "that even when I look away from Christ, His gaze stays fixed upon me." Kimm Crandall

Believing in Jesus; never outside his care, his provision, his embrace...

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Application:

Consider Jesus - wracked with worry, turn to the one who took on your troubles, your sin, and gives you his life, his future. Believe in Jesus.

Believers, married or not... wanting to be or not... Trust in him... Don't go it alone. The practicalities of this text say it is good to have help, this is what Christian community, the church is for, to remind us of Christ, of the better perspective we can have on life and to petition God for each other.

Surrender your anxieties - Give them over to Jesus, to his purpose, his glory and your good. For which one of you can being anxious add one hour to your life?! So surrender it... Sometimes Christ calms the storm. And sometimes he lets the storm rage and calms his child.

“If your hope is anchored in Jesus, the worst case future scenario for you is resurrection and everlasting life.” Scott Sauls

Live - like the present form of this world is passing away... because it is. Let Jesus change your priorities and free you from being anxious, and empower you to be devoted to him.

To another church Paul writes these words: **Philippians 4:4-7** “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. [5] Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; [6] do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. [7] And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

May we experience this peace, may we surrender our anxiety and seek Jesus and live in thanksgiving.