

Session 1 –  
Understanding the  
experience  
Helen Thorne

# ANXIETY

## ANXIETY: THE DEFINITION AND PREVALENCE

Fear or apprehension at future events – real or perceived – that impacts body and heart.

- In 2013, there were 8.2 million cases of anxiety in the UK.
- In England women are almost twice as likely to be diagnosed with anxiety disorders as men.
- The one-week prevalence of generalised anxiety in England is 6.6%
- In lockdown – up to 66%



ANXIETY:  
THE  
EXPERIENCE

What does anxiety feel like?  
Consider the physical, emotional,  
relational and spiritual factors.

## ANXIETY: THE SCOPE

- Generalised anxiety disorder
- Panic disorder
- Phobias eg agoraphobia or claustrophobia
- Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- Social anxiety disorder (social phobia)

## ANXIETY: THE ESCAPE

- Control
- Food
- Alcohol / drugs
- Sex / pornography
- Shopping
- Gaming / scrolling
- Over-activity



## ANXIETY: THE CHRISTIAN STRUGGLE

Some would say (or at least assume) that Christians shouldn't struggle with anxiety. What might be the roots of such beliefs?

## ANXIETY: THE CAUSES

- Jesus spoke frequently of anxiety because he knew we would struggle! And knew that struggle would impact our embodied souls.
- Broken world (Genesis 3)
  - Broken pasts – presents – futures
  - Broken bodies (genes, hormones)
  - Broken desires



## CASE STUDY

Jess is 26, a young mum surviving on little sleep. She is living in a small flat with her husband and baby son and money is tight to the point that buying food can be hard. She has been a Christian for as long as she can remember but is finding prayer and Bible reading impossible. She feels life is out of control and abandoned by God. She cries frequently and regularly experiences panic. Often isolated, she can go for days without leaving the house.

What might the roots of her anxiety be?

## ANXIETY: THE SECULAR PRESCRIPTIONS

- Self-help (online relaxation, coping strategies)
- Talking therapy (often CBT)
- Medication (SSRIs, Benzodiazepines)
- Mindfulness

## ANXIETY: THE MINDFULNESS REVOLUTION

- Buddhist roots – secular development
- Meditative processes
- Focus on the present (paying attention to breathing)
- Acceptance / curiosity about experience (noting thoughts and feelings but then setting aside)
- A problem of perception – a self with a solution

## ANXIETY: SIMPLE PRACTICAL RESPONSES

- Breathing
- Grounding
- Resting
- Reprioritising
- Exercise
- Medication



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What practical strategies might help her?



ANXIETY:  
THE  
EXPERIENCE

Much as these practical strategies are deeply useful, how are they inadequate on their own?

PREPARING TO  
RESPOND  
BIBLICALLY

## Ephesians 4

- God brings us together (v1-6)
- God gifts us (v7-11)
- Pastors teach us (v12)
- We serve one another (v12-13)
- By speaking the truth in love (v14-15)
- And we're all built up (v16)

PREPARING TO  
RESPOND  
BIBLICALLY

- Bible
- Boundaries
- Hippos!



Session 2 –  
Responding biblically  
Helen Thorne

# ANXIETY

## LISTENING TO ANXIETY

- Listen to words
- Listen to emotions
- Listen to behaviour
- Ask open questions



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What questions might you ask?

## SPEAKING INTO ANXIETY

Words that make a difference ...

- Words that root
- Words that refine
- Words that relate

... to saints, sufferers and sinners

WORDS THAT ROOT  
– IN WHO GOD IS

## Truth and lies

- God is with us ... he knows every facet of our pain (Ps 139)
- God is our Refuge ... we can go to him as we are (Ps 18)
- God is our Shepherd ... he is leading us through the fear (Ps 23)
- God is our Provider ... he gives us what we need each and every day (Ex 12)
- God is our King ... sovereign over our circumstances and bringing purpose to them (Gen 50)

WORDS THAT ROOT  
– IN WHO WE ARE

## Genesis 1

- Image of God

## Ephesians 1

- Past forgiven ... as we are lavished with grace
- Present equipped ... as the Spirit dwells inside
- Future secure ... as our inheritance is kept safe



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How is Jess forgetting who God is? And who she is? What truths might help her?

WORDS THAT  
REFINE – THE JOY OF  
PERSEVERING

## Hebrews 12:1-3

<sup>1</sup>Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, <sup>2</sup>fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.

WORDS THAT  
REFINE – THE  
BEAUTY OF CHANGE

## Ephesians 4:22-24

- Take off our old self
- Have our minds transformed through God's word and work
- Put on our new self

One baby step at a time ...



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What might Jess take off and put on? Where might you start?

WORDS THAT  
RELATE – TO GOD

- Prayers of release ... *“Please take this away ... “*
- Prayers of reliance ... *“Help me trust in you, Lord ... “*
- Prayers of repentance ... *“I’m sorry for those times when I’ve doubted you...“*
- Prayers of reorientation ... *“As I struggle, change me to be more like Jesus ... “*
- Prayers of resurrection ... *“Thank you, that one day I will be free ... “*

WORDS THAT  
RELATE – TO  
OTHERS

- Communities of care

*Just as a nursing mother cares for her children,<sup>8</sup> so we cared for you. Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well. (1 Thessalonians 2:7-8)*



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Think personally. How could each of you get alongside Jess with the gifts and capacity you have?

# RESOURCES

[www.biblicalcounselling.org.uk](http://www.biblicalcounselling.org.uk)

[www.ccef.org](http://www.ccef.org)

Running Scared, Ed Welch

Mirror, Mirror – Graham Beynon

Real Change – Andrew Nicholls and Helen Thorne

Hope in an Anxious World – Helen Thorne

