

Theme: Antidotes for an Out of Control Life
“Finding Peace in a High Anxiety World”

Sermon preached by Jeff Huber

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Psalm 56:2-4, 10-13

*I am constantly hounded by those who slander me,
and many are boldly attacking me.*

But when I am afraid, I will put my trust in you.

I praise God for what he has promised.

I trust in God, so why should I be afraid?

What can mere mortals do to me?

I praise God for what he has promised;

Yes, I praise the Lord for what he has promised.

I trust in God, so why should I be afraid? What can mere mortals do to me?

I will fulfill my vows to you, O God,

and will offer a sacrifice of thanks for your help.

For you have rescued me from death; you have kept my feet from slipping.

So now I can walk in your presence, O God, in your life-giving light.

VIDEO Raising Arizona

SLIDE Finding Peace in a High Anxiety World

Today we are talking about anxiety, fear, worry and stress. We're in the midst of a series of sermons on antidotes for out-of-control life, recognizing that most of us live out-of-control lives in some places in our lives. We are out of control in the things that we have committed to and if we are not way overcommitted then we are in a hurry all the time. If we are not in a hurry then we are worrying all the time. If we are not worrying then we find ourselves stressed out all the time. This month, as we begin a new year, we have set out to take a look at what needs to change so that we can live lives where we see clearly, listen carefully, think deeply, savor life fully and serve God effectively.

Today we will focus on anxiety, worry, fear and stress recognizing that they are intertwined. The Bible gives us ways to deal with all of these things and it is the same advice for each of these feelings and experiences. We are going to talk about the high anxiety lives that we live and the stress that we experience and

then we are going to talk about the Bible's answer.

I want to start up front by recognizing that this is a very simple sermon. This is not complicated and it is not rocket science. This does not require a master of divinity degree to figure out how to share this with you. There is a consistent message throughout the Bible on how we deal with fear, anxiety, worry and stress and we are going to look at that today in depth.

I want to invite you to take out of your bulletin your Message Notes and your Meditation Moments. There is a Scripture that we used at the top of these and then a space for you to write things down. I hope there is at least one or two things that you feel like God is speaking just to you and then you might write those things down so you can remember them better in the days ahead. On the other side of that you will find daily Scripture readings which connect to today's message. If you take a few minutes each day to read the Scriptures I think it will reinforce what you here today in the message.

SLIDE Fear and Worry

Let's start by looking at fear and worry. You know that all animals have a self-preservation instinct. We have a mechanism inside of us which is supposed to make us worry about things that we should be worried about. This is important and it is a way that animals know that there is danger and so all animals have an instinct to fight or to flee when there is danger or something to be worried about or to be afraid of.

That actually is a gift from God. All fear is not bad. There are some times that you should be afraid and when there is danger that instinct tells us to be wary of. There is a splash of chemicals on your brain which sends electrical responses to the rest of your body so you are prepared for whatever danger lies ahead. Several months ago I was lying in bed and I heard a noise in the kitchen and it startles me awake. I was sure there was someone in the house and as I was listening and lying there I find my heart begins to beat very fast and very hard. I can hear it in my years and it feels like it is going to jump out of my chest. I am anxious and I am concerned. Should I call 911? What do I do?

Finally, I did what most of you guys would've done. I woke up my wife and said, "Tami, go and see who's there!" I actually did do that. My wife actually sleeps through everything so instead I grabbed this stone book-end that sits on my nightstand and I tiptoed downstairs. I flipped on the light and who should I see but our dog Joey who normally sleeps outside had gotten into the house and he was up on the countertops doing some counter surfing looking for food. Actually

think I surprised him more than me because then his flee instinct hit we saw me standing there with a heavy object in my hand and he jumped off of the counter and scurried out the door!

I had a fear mechanism which had triggered an appropriate response if there actually was a thief in the house. The challenge of course is that the part of our brain which does this doesn't always know when there is a real threat or not. That response didn't know if it was a thief or Joey the dog in the kitchen. More than that, that instinct sometimes imagines things that should be afraid of which are really there. This good gift of God sometimes gets distorted or gets hyperactive.

It happens when we are children because we don't really know to be afraid of many things when we are young but we are trained by our families and our parents to be afraid of some things. That is good when we teach our children to be afraid of running out in the street in front of cars or of climbing up on the roof or to be afraid of the hot stove. But once we start learning how to fear things that are real we begin to start making things up in our minds that we are afraid of and our imagination takes over.

When I was a little boy I began to imagine that there was a monster that lived down the street in a mysterious house that none of the kids in our neighborhood would enter. It was Mr. Filer's house and I still remember his name. The kids in the neighborhood made up stories about him and one day my friend Chris told me that he would come out at night and hide in our closets and I believed him. I was terrified that Mr. Filer was living in my closet at night. I imagined him hiding in my closet waiting until I fell asleep. I couldn't decide if it was better to go to sleep with the closet open or the closet closed.

For any children who are in worship today you need to know that there are no monsters living under your bed or in your closet. They do not exist and they are a figment of our imagination, but when I was that young boy I was terrified and really scared. Somebody suggested that I will put a lock on my closet or take the doors off and empty it out. That may have worked but all I know is that I was scared. There are not really monsters and our parents try to teach us and sometimes a nightlight helps or looking at wonderful pictures before you go to bed. The thing I'm going to teach you at the end of the sermon is what is helpful for adults and even children who were four or five years old and will help alleviate our fear and anxiety.

But even when we grow up there are still monsters under our bed or in our

closet. There are things that we become terrified that will happen. There are voices all around us telling us what we should be afraid of. We have 24-hour news that we get on our smart phones and we hear about one little thing that happened in one part of the world and we begin to imagine that he could happen to us. Even though it only happened to one person in the country of 600 million we begin to imagine if you happen to us and we get terrified and sometimes we freeze and are paralyzed by our fear. We get that over and over and over again every day.

Then we listen to talk radio or talk news on the television, whether we are on the left or on the right, and those voices are telling us what we should be afraid of. The Earth is going to hell in a hand-basket according to many commentators because of the people who happen to be in charge now or the people that used to be in charge then. There may be things that we have legitimate fears about but we have no control over and we stew over them. We often entertain ourselves with those thoughts and we like to be scared out of our wits and then we wonder why we're anxious all the time and worried and afraid.

We go to the movies or we watch a television show and we find ourselves morbidly drawn to something that describes the destruction of the human race or some strange and hideous crime. We get worried about asteroids and global warming and global cooling and aliens and plagues and apes taking over the world. We have message after message which tells us we should be afraid, really, really afraid. I can't remember who said it but there was a character in the movie who once said, "Be afraid, very, very afraid!"

On top of that there is the normal stuff that we are afraid of. We have a fear of being rejected and we have a fear of failure. We fear what is going to happen to our retirement. Will it even be there by the time that we need it? We fear what happens in the stock market each day and we fear if our children will be okay when they go to school or when they go off to school. All of these things leave our natural fear mechanism in a hyper-drive mode.

There are some people whose early warning system never shuts down. It is always telling them that there is something to be afraid of. We talk about that as generalized anxiety disorder or panic attacks. Right now there are 48 million Americans who take Xanax which helps to deal with anxiety. That is about 15% of the population. A number of you in this congregation struggle with panic and anxiety. You may have showed up at the emergency room because your heart is going crazy and you are certain that you are dying of a heart attack. Your hands

maybe get sweaty when you are in a large group. There are many other physiological experiences that you have and that maybe you are having even now as I describe these things. Some of you have shared your experiences with me.

One woman said, "My obsession with worrying makes me preoccupied and unable to enjoy the moments of my life. Most of my anxiety comes from worries-something bad is going to happen to my family or myself. I worry about my kids and what would happen to them if something happened to me. That worry leads me to think that every cough, sore muscle or headache is the cancer that is going to kill me and take away my family. My obsession with worrying about bad things makes me so preoccupied that I become irritable. I yell at my kids and I miss great moments with my family and friends because my mind won't stop racing."

She then put in bold this last line which summarizes this sermon series and why we're doing it.

SLIDE ***I am not a person who feels like I am out of control, at least not in the day-to-day things that happen, but I am living a mentally out-of-control life.***

This is where many of us find ourselves. We are living mentally out-of-control life and while we might not have clinical anxiety or panic attacks we certainly no fear. In a moment will come back to the Bible's answer to this issue but let's talk about stress for a moment.

SLIDE **Stress**

I don't find myself afraid most of the time although occasionally I will become worried. But I do feel stress a lot. Stress is not necessarily a bad thing because in many ways it can act like fear and worry. There are legitimate fear and worry and then there is over the top fear and worry. The same thing is true with stress. Stress as is defined is a demand on our physical, emotional, spiritual or mental strength. Stress is not a bad thing in and of itself. As a matter of fact, if you want your muscles to get stronger than you need to stress them a bit. If you want your mental abilities to get stronger than you need to push yourself sometimes. Living a stress free life can often mean you're not really doing anything. I don't think we are meant to live a totally stress free life. I think we are meant to have some level of stress because it helps us grow.

Dr. Paul Roche who is the president of the American Institute of Stress notes that increased stress produces productivity but only up to a point. After

that tipping point things rapidly deteriorate and that level of stress differs for each of us. This is an important concept because the things that stress you out may not stress me out. The things that stress me out may not stress you out. I know people who would be terrified and stressed out if they had to stand up in front of a group of 25 or 30 and say something or to pray out loud in front of her group. But I get energized by that because stressors are different for different people.

Dr. Roche talks about it like the tension on a violin or guitar string.

SLIDE ***Not enough stress produces a dull and raspy sound from the instrument, but too much stress produces an irritating screech or it snaps the strings. Just the correct degree of stress creates a beautiful tone.***

You don't want to have no stress in your life because you need stress. Stress comes from knowing that you have an algebra exam this Wednesday. That is a good thing because it forces you to study and to prepare, then you take the exam and you know something and you have learned something. For me I get a bit of stress every Tuesday as I begin to work on my sermon. I feel a demand upon me which forces me to work harder to let I have something worth saying that is meaningful for you and I don't embarrass myself or God. The last thing I want is to have you leading worship on the weekend saying, "Why in the world that I come this weekend? Jeff clearly did not have enough stress in his life this week!"

Stress is not necessarily a bad thing but the problem comes when you are overloaded by stress. We talked two weeks ago about the idea that you have energy that you build up and that you can draw upon and when you draw upon that energy is called load. Today we are talking about that load as demand or stress. Problems occur when you have too many stressors and too many things that need your emotional, physical, spiritual, financial resources and time then you will find you don't have enough energy to meet all of that load. When you have more stress and demands than you have the resources to meet them you become stressed out and overloaded.

You know what it feels like to be stressed out. Listen to this group of ordinary folks who talk about what it feels like to be stressed out and what causes that stress.

VIDEO **Stress interviews**

SLIDE **Stress**

Just out of curiosity, calmly if you have felt stressed out sometime here in the last week? Many of us have felt stressed out so let me remind you a bit about what happens when we feel too much stress. We started this series because we recognize that many of us feel overwhelmed and stressed out so we started this series by talking about the idea of Sabbath. We talked about the importance of rest and renewal and remembering who we are and whose we are. When we take Sabbath that means that one day in seven we stop doing all the things that draw upon our energy or drain us and we do the things instead which renew us and gives us strength.

SLIDE Sabbath = Rest, Renewal and Remembering

Part of what we do is gather for worship. Part of what we do is to read Scripture. Part of what we do is gather with friends. What we do on our Sabbath is to find things that are fun and that are renewing and gives us energy to meet the demands that are placed upon us each day.

We talked in that first week about how we have to increase energy but we also have to decrease load and the demand. We talked about thinning out or starting to pull out some of the things in our lives that we don't need to be doing.

SLIDE Saying "Yes" and "No" intentionally

That led into week two, last week, in which we talked about saying "yes" intentionally. We recognize that every time we go about saying "yes" to a demand that comes up we are saying "no" to something else because you have a limited amount of time and energy. When you say "yes" to something then you have to ask yourself, if you are already stressed out, what will you now say "no" to so that you can say that "yes." We talked about how many times we need to train ourselves to say "no" to those things which we always say "yes" to and what helps you with that is rule number six.

SLIDE Rule No. 6 = "Don't take yourself so darn seriously"

There are many things that you think you have to do because you are the only one who can do them. But sometimes we have to remind ourselves that God can accomplish things without us. It is okay to recognize that the world does not revolve around you and that God will and can accomplish things without you.

Yet there are other things in which you are absolutely essential and God needs you to accomplish what he hopes to do. Part of our task is to figure out where our presence is essential and where it is not. This helps you to say "no" to some things so that you can say "yes" to greater things which can make a

difference and help bring about God's kingdom.

So we have these ideas of Sabbath and rest and renewal and remembering who you are. We thin out our lives and say "no" to some things so we can say a greater "yes" to other things and we remember that in the end we don't take ourselves so seriously.

Underneath all of that there is one final answer that the Scripture gives us to dealing with the stress and the worry any anxiety in our lives. There are lots of things you can do to address these issues of fear and worry and anxiety and stress. Some of those things you really need to do and take advantage of. If you struggle with chronic anxiety then you may need to talk with a psychiatrist or psychologist. You may need to be on medication for a while to help you move beyond that. If you are struggling with stress all of the time you may need a life coach or a counselor or someone who can help you manage the stress and make choices to say "yes" and "no" at the appropriate times. You may need to exercise and you may need to eat better and you may need to get more sleep. All those things are important in helping you deal with fear, anxiety, worry and stress.

But let me share with you the one biblical answer which is underneath each of these. In the biblical times King David didn't have access to a psychiatrist or to Xanax or Zoloft. Jesus didn't have a life coach who was helping him in the garden of Gethsemane when he was preparing for the anxiety of facing his own death. Starting from the very beginning of the Bible all the way through it until the book of Revelation in the end there was one common answer which was given. You already know this but today I want to encourage you to think how we might live into it. **It is not the only answer but it is the foundational answer.**

More than 100 times the biblical authors give this same commandment that we read today. We hear God saying to the biblical authors over and over again these words.

SLIDE Do not be afraid.

We know we shouldn't be afraid but we need to know why. Why should we be afraid? Eight times Jesus makes reference to the great Commandments. Do you remember what they are? "Love God with all of your heart, soul, mind and strength and love your neighbor as you love yourself."

Do you know how many times he tells his disciples to not be afraid? 25 times he says to them these words, "Do not be afraid." Eight times he gives the great Commandments and 25 times he tells them, "Do not be afraid."

That's great but we still need a reason why we shouldn't be afraid. It's not enough just to be told not to be afraid but we need the answer this question, "Why?"

Be interesting thing is that in almost every situation God tells us why. Isaiah 41:10 is the passage that many of you have memorized. God speaks through the prophet Isaiah to the children of Israel when he says these words.

SLIDE *Don't be afraid, for I am with you.*
Don't be discouraged, for I am your God.
I will strengthen you and help you.
I will hold you up with my victorious right hand.

"Don't be afraid because I am with you."

This is the common refrain in the Scriptures. God says, "I will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid because I am walking by your side. I am as near as the air that you breathe."

God does not say, "Hey, don't worry about it. Just pray and I will make it all better with the snap of my fingers. I will just take care of it and it won't be a problem so don't you worry your pretty little head."

God says to the prophet Isaiah in 43:2 these words.

SLIDE *When you go through deep waters,*
I will be with you.
When you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown.
When you walk through the fire of oppression, you will not be
burned up; the flames will not consume you.

God doesn't say that he is going to keep you from going through the fires or the deep waters or the rivers of difficulty. God says that WHEN you walk through them I will be with you. It is not a matter of "if" but "when" and when you go through the floods and the fire God says, "I will be with you. Do not be afraid."

God says that in some way, "I will guide you and comfort you and carry you. In the end I will redeem everything that you walk through so trust me."

It is not a promise that nothing bad is going to happen in your life. It is not a promise that nothing bad will happen to your children. Every single day I entrust my children to God. I literally know they belonged to God before they came into my life and they will be God's long after I am gone. I dropped off each day at school and I say a little prayer when they get out of the car, "God, I give my

children to you. I entrust them to you so please be with them."

I don't think that means they will not be picked on at school sometimes. I don't think it means they will never struggle with school work or with getting along with teachers. I don't think it will keep them from falling on the playground and hurting themselves. I have buried enough children who were sick whose parents have prayed every day for their kids to know that is not what it means. I have buried enough teenagers whose parents have prayed for them every day that I know is not what that means when I pray for them.

What I believe that it means is that no matter what happens in their lives I know that God will not let them go. God will hold their hands like I did when they were little so they wouldn't be afraid. Somehow, God is going to take even the difficult and tragic and tough things in life and he will redeem them and bring something good from them. I am entrusting them to God. I'm counting on the fact that even if the worst thing should happen to my children God still has a hold of them and he will let them go.

That's what God is promising in the Scriptures.

David finds this reality of great comfort in the Scriptures. Many times he is dealing with high anxiety and great stress for himself. But then he says things like this in Psalm 55:22.

SLIDE *Give your burdens to the Lord, and he will take care of you.*

I realize what many of you are thinking. "David could say that because he was the King of Israel. Things always went well for him but I am no King or Queen and I don't have all the luxuries that he had."

If that is what you think then you may not know David's story. Psalm 55 begins with these words.

**SLIDE *Listen to my prayer, O God.
Do not ignore my cry for help!
Please listen and answer me,
for I am overwhelmed by my troubles.
My heart pounds in my chest.
The terror of death assaults me.
Fear and trembling overwhelm me,
and I can't stop shaking.***

After David has laid before God all of his troubles and all of his worries and all of his anxieties at the beginning of this Psalm by the end he is able to say, "Cast

all of your cares upon the Lord and he will sustain you."

It doesn't say that you will be spared anxiety or worry or stress but it does say that God will sustain you if you will turn to him. Another Psalm of David is Psalm 56 that we read today. It begins with these two verses.

SLIDE ***O God, have mercy on me, for people are hounding me.
My foes attack me all day long.
I am constantly hounded by those who slander me, and many are
boldly attacking me.***

When these Psalms were written down they were attached to different times of David's life. This one was written when David was fleeing for his life from King Saul. David is not the King yet but he is a soldier and King Saul is jealous and threatened by David so he seeks to kill David. There is no place that is safe for David to go, not even his hometown. The King wants to kill him and he has done nothing wrong except be the one that God said will be the next king. He is innocent and yet the King wants to kill him.

I don't know if you have ever had death threats against you but when I was serving as a youth pastor in Colorado Springs the juvenile judge in El Paso County was a member of our church and help out with the youth ministry. She used to have the youth group come to her courtroom and she would have them sit in the defendant's box and then have them led away in shackles to get across the point that they would never want to be in her courtroom. I had a few kids who were having brushes with the law and that moment straightened them out in a hurry! She also shared that she had numerous death threats against her over the course of her career as a judge. She talked about being terrified of that experience and looking over her shoulder constantly.

David has a price on his head when he writes Psalm 56. He has to flee his own homeland and go to the land of his enemies the Philistines. While he is in the Philistines territory he has to act like a lunatic or a madman because the Philistines don't like him either but they will stay away from him if he acts crazy. In this setting where David is surrounded by enemies in the East and the West and the North and South, he asked God for help because his enemies want to trample him. Talk about stress and fear and anxiety—David was living in that moment.

But David goes on to say in our Scripture from today.

SLIDE3 ***But when I am afraid,
I will put my trust in you.***

*I praise God for what he has promised.
I trust in God, so why should I be afraid?
What can mere mortals do to me? I praise God for what he has
promised;
Yes, I praise the Lord for what he has promised.
I trust in God, so why should I be afraid?
What can mere mortals do to me?
I will fulfill my vows to you, O God,
and will offer a sacrifice of thanks for your help.
For you have rescued me from death;
you have kept my feet from slipping.
So now I can walk in your presence, O God, in your life-giving light.*

There are many things we can do to alleviate stress. There are many things we can do to deal with anxiety and panic and fear, but underneath all of those the biblical answer is that God is with you. God will sustain you so cast your burden upon him. God will walk with you and God will take even the tragedies and the difficulties and the painful things and the things you are terrified of and use them and somehow redeem them. God will not let you go.

We hear that when Jesus is in the garden of Gethsemane on the night before he was put to death on the cross. He was about to be arrested when he went to the garden and no doubt there was anguish and fear and stress that had been building throughout that entire week. The Gospels say that Jesus throws himself to the ground. One of the Gospels tells us that he perspire as drops of blood and he cries out to God, "Father, please take this cup from me. I don't want to have to walk through this."

But Jesus knows that trusting in God and even praying to God doesn't necessarily mean all of your prayers will be answered in the way that you want them to be. This is an instant of the prayers of Jesus not being answered. Jesus himself was not delivered the way he had prayed but the end of his prayer captures the ultimate trust in God when he says:

SLIDE ***Yet not my will but thy will be done.***

Jesus knew that God would sustain him and walk with him. God would take the tragedy and the pain and use it to redeem all of humanity and bring about the salvation of all of creation.

The apostle Paul is in a prison cell in Rome writing to the church at Philippi. It is a passage of Scripture that many of you have memorized and this letter is

known as the epistle of joy. Paul is in prison awaiting news as to whether he will be executed or set free. Imagine that he is on death row and he is not certain if you will be pardoned or not. In the context of that he writes this letter of joy that expresses how he finds joy in the midst of an anxious and stressed filled moment. These words give to us an idea of how we might find peace in the face of uncertainty, adversity and perhaps even death. Philippians 4 reads:

**SLIDE *Remember, the Lord is near.
Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.***

I love the fact that Paul, first and foremost, reminds them that God is near. This is why you don't have to worry, because God is near. Cast your burdens upon the Lord and God will sustain you. He is reiterating what we read in the Psalms.

When you do that, Paul says, do it with Thanksgiving and give thanks to God in the midst of your adversity. I love that line because it reminds us that when we focus on the things we are thankful for, even in the midst of adversity and worry and stress, it takes our mind off of the stress and that thing we are afraid of when we focus on those things we are grateful for.

When we lay all of this in God's hands we find his peace that will sustain us. Not only will the peace sustain us but that peace will guard our hearts and minds as we live in Christ Jesus.

One of the places where you see fear and anxiety and stress all come together is when you are unemployed. Several members in our congregation have experienced that for months at a time. This is what some of them have shared about that experience.

When I was out of work for a year I kept a "Give it to the Lord" Journal. I wrote down all of my anxieties and all of my fears every day. When I would start to be afraid I would open up the Journal and write those things down and give them to God. Then I would close the book and when I closed the book it was as if I was saying, "Lord I give it to you." The very act of writing down and closing the book allowed me to let go of it for a time. Then when I would start to be afraid again I would open up my journal and write in it once more, "Lord, here are the things that I am afraid of and this is what I am worried about." I would close the book and once more would feel like God had heard me and I can let go of those

worries and fears. That brought me so much peace.

Here is another testimony.

I found the following helpful with the stress, worry and anxiety. The first thing is prayer. Instead of waking and going to sleep with anxious thoughts I would wake up and try to be in prayer the moment I awoke so I was thinking about God to begin today. The last thought of the day wouldn't be what I was worried about but instead I would give God thanks in prayer. Then my dreams were about my prayers and not the things I was worried about.

In addition to prayer I served in the community at the soup kitchen and he gave me new perspective and raised my spirits to care for others instead of being focused on my problems. I had a small group in the church that sustained me and carried me when I couldn't walk any further. Of course, it was also knowing that the worst thing in my life would never be the last thing.

We find that all of those things that were just mentioned are tools and disciplines to help us be able to trust in God. If you are wondering how you can trust in God when things get tough let me give you a couple of suggestions.

First, we pray and when we pray we say certain things in our prayers that reaffirm our faith. David and Paul both affirm their faith in the prayers that we heard in Scripture and when they say it out loud and write it down they begin to feel it. John Wesley who was the founder of Methodism used to say to his pastors this truth.

SLIDE *Preach faith until you have it.*

Somehow, in the very act of preaching about faith and praying about it and writing it down you find that trust in God begins to well up inside of your heart.

When you join a small group like Alpha which is starting up this week or one of our Voyager groups or Financial Peace or a Sunday school class or another small group of some sort we share our burdens and we also share our faith with one another and we find our faith is strengthened.

We can read through the Scriptures and be encouraged. There were a lot of things I didn't get done this week and I found myself preparing for this sermon and being a bit anxious and stressed myself. I began to read some of the passages that we have read so far and I start to feel God's presence and God's peace Justin reading the Scriptures.

When we begin to serve others we take our eyes off of ourselves and we

put focus on other people and we find God's presence in the midst of that.

We gather for worship and we sing songs together and when you actually sing the songs, many of which are simply Scripture put to music, we can find faith welling up inside of us. When you hear the word proclaimed in worship it hopefully can touch your heart.

All of these things can help us remember who we are and that we were made by God to be loved by God and that allows us to put our trust in God. Our circumstances might tend to make us be afraid or anxious or worried or stressed out, but we can choose how we want to focus our hearts and our minds and our soul in the midst of those circumstances.

I was putting together this sermon and I was reminded of a young man who went in for his annual physical. After they had done blood work the doctor called him back to the office and the young man figured that he had high cholesterol or there was some other minor issue in his work up that needed to be addressed with more exercise. After all he had put on a bit of weight this year until he figured it was no big deal.

But when he met with the doctor he was told that his blood work pointed to a very rare disease for which there was no treatment and no cure. In essence it would be a death sentence if he had this disease. He left the doctor's office and he went to his family's Christmas party and when he arrived his family could tell there was something wrong. He said, *"I felt this fear gripping me. I was terrified and I felt every muscle in my body was aching when I arrived at the house. I look at my family and I looked at my children and I thought that I would not see them grow up and my heart ached. My mind raced ahead to the kind of treatment they could try but that I probably wouldn't survive. I began to think about all the things that I wouldn't see or experience."*

He was frozen and paralyzed by his fear and the terrible thing was that the doctor had ordered a test that would give them a definitive answer but he wouldn't get the results for three weeks. The worst part is that in between period where you can dream up all the worst-case scenarios. You can deal with things if you know exactly what it is but when you are not certain it makes things even worse and it exacerbates the fear.

He began to find some peace by going to worship and by saying prayers and by serving others. Three weeks ago by and he gets the results back and he does have the disease but it is a form that is treatable. He walked through this hell for three weeks and then he gets tremendous relief from a brush with death.

When you have that brush with death you learned a great deal about yourself and about where you find peace in the midst of that anxiety. He had received a devotional guide from a friend and he began to read the prayers and Scriptures each day and in that he found the beginning of peace. He felt like God was speaking to him and saying a word to him each day, reminding him that God was present and near. He learned that when anxiety attacks begin in situations like that, and they do often, to focus on God. When he found his heart racing and his palms getting sweaty he would simply say under his breath, **"I trust you Jesus. Help me Jesus to feel you right now."**

We call those "breath prayers" which are short little prayers you can say quickly under your breath. You might have to say them 20 times a day when you feel that fear or anxiety or you feel stressed out. You can simply say, **"Help me Jesus. I trust in you Jesus. Be with me now God."**

He would pray quietly and calm would return and the pain would subside. This plus the love and comfort from his wife and from his kids and from his church friends. There were people praying for me from a distance that he had not seen in years and all of these things were blessings. He found peace in those moments in the midst of the fear and adversity and stress.

His wife told him that after that brush with death he became a different person. He became more loving and more caring and more compassionate and more appreciative of everyday things. God not only sustained him through those moments but God also used the anxiety and the fear and stress to change his heart and to change his soul and to change his character.

What he experienced was exactly what Paul and David expressed experiencing. It was experienced by Abraham and Sarah. It was experienced by Moses and by Miriam. It was experienced by Joshua as he entered the Promised Land and through the prophets and then Jesus and the first disciples. All throughout Scripture there is a message that comes to us again and again about times of anxiety and fear and stress. It is simply this.

SLIDE "Do not be afraid for I am with you. I will sustain you."

This is not a silver bullet and it is not complicated. It doesn't take a Masters Degree to figure this out. It simply takes practicing the things that allow you to experience peace and to know his presence and to trust in that with all of your heart.

When I feel stressed one of the things I like to do is sing praise songs and

hymns. One of the songs that I like to sing is a song that was written by Amy Grant a number of years ago. I have sung this song at funerals for young people and I sang this song at the bedside of young man who was clinging to life after car accident.

Doug was unconscious and the CAT scan revealed massive bleeding in his brain. The family was trying to decide the next course of action and the youth group had gathered with me in the emergency room. In that moment I felt God speak to me that we should sing this song as we sat around Doug's bedside. The strange part is that several of the youth had the same thought at the same moment because we sang this song in youth group almost every week. We sang it hoping that he would hear the words and we sang for his parents and his brother. The words go like this.

SLIDE ***We believe in God and we all need Jesus,
Cause life is hard and it might not get easier.
But don't be afraid, to know who you are,
And don't be afraid to show it.
If you believe in God, if you say you need Jesus.
He'll be where you are, and he never will leave you.
Sing to me now, words that are true, so all in this place can know it.
We believe in God and we all need Jesus.
We believe in God and we all need Jesus.
Sing to me now, words that are true, so all in this place can know it.
We believe in God and we all need Jesus.
We believe in God and we all need Jesus.
We believe in God and we all need Jesus.***

This is God's word to us, from the book of Genesis to the book of Revelation that, "I will walk with you. I will never leave you nor forsake you. I will sustain you," and so we trust in that. This allowed David to say, "***But when I am afraid, I will put my trust in you.***"

Would you bow in prayer with me?

SLIDE **Prayer**

While your heads are bowed and your eyes are closed I would like to invite you to make this your prayer quietly under your breath. I'll say a line and you can repeat quietly after me if you feel so moved.

*God I trust in you.
Help me not to be afraid.
I trust that you are with me.
I trust that you will sustain me.
I trust that you will bring good from evil.
I trust you with my family and my friends.
I trust you with my health.
I trust you with my future.
I trust you with my life.
Help me not to be afraid.
In your name, Amen.*

Sermon Series: Antidotes for An Out-of-Control Life

Sermon Title: "Finding Peace in a High Anxiety World"

Psalm 56:2-4, 10-13

I am constantly hounded by those who slander me, and many are boldly attacking me.

But when I am afraid, I will put my trust in you.

I praise God for what he has promised. I trust in God, so why should I be afraid?

What can mere mortals do to me?

I praise God for what he has promised; Yes, I praise the Lord for what he has promised.

I trust in God, so why should I be afraid? What can mere mortals do to me?

I will fulfill my vows to you, O God, and will offer a sacrifice of thanks for your help.

For you have rescued me from death; you have kept my feet from slipping.

So now I can walk in your presence, O God, in your life-giving light.

Things I'd like to remember from today's sermon:

Meditation Moments

Monday, January 23 – Read Exodus 14:5, 9-16. As scary situations go, being an unarmed former slave on the edge of an inland sea, and seeing your former master’s mighty army closing in on you, would have to rank high. Pharaoh had chariots, horses and trained troops. Israel had their bare hands, and God. Then Moses spoke the extraordinary words we’ll see often this week: “Do not be afraid.”

- *The terrified Israelites saw only two choices: “It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!” God said, “March through the sea,” which they didn’t think was possible. Faced with a choice you saw as hopeless, when have you found a way through that you had ruled out? Can you see God’s hand in that?*
- *This passage highlights the paradox Christ-followers often face. In verse 14, Moses said “you need only to be still.” In verse 15 God told Moses, “Tell the people to move on.” Both messages were needed. How have you learned to discern when God is calling you to be still and trust, and when God’s call is for you to “move on” and take action?*

Tuesday, January 24 – Read Psalm 37:5-11. When we read Bible verses that say “Do not fear,” we’re often inclined to think, “Yeah, but they don’t know what I’m facing!” But the Bible writers did not live in some movie fairyland. This psalmist knew well that “people succeed in their own way” and “carry out their wicked schemes.” In spite of that he said, “Trust in the Lord—be still before the Lord.”

- *When we read “[God] will make your righteous reward shine like the dawn,” we tend (especially if things are tough) to ask, “When?” The psalm hints at an answer we may struggle with: “Wait patiently for him.” How can God’s promise to renew us inwardly give us strength to press on in faith even at times when our lives seem broken?*

- *Did you know Jesus quoted Psalm 37 in the Beatitudes? “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth” (Matthew 5:5). This is “revolutionary stuff,” wrote commentator Michael Green. Do “the meek” (not “weak” people, but “in control of their passions, humble”) ever win, even in this life? Are you strong enough to be that kind of winner?*

Wednesday, January 25 – Read Isaiah 43:1-7. Far from promising us that trust in God ensures that nothing bad can ever happen in this life, Isaiah knew that, sooner or later, bad things come to all of us. In John 16:33, Jesus said, “In this world you **will** have trouble.” Isaiah wrote, “When [not “if”] you pass through the waters ...When you walk through the fire.” But he began with familiar words: “Do not fear.”

- *An ancient tradition said King Manasseh killed Isaiah. Jesus was crucified. The Romans beheaded Paul the apostle. Does that history belie the truth of this passage’s promises? Hebrews 2:15 said Jesus’ resurrection can “free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.” In what ways can the fear of death limit our ability to live for God and others? To what extent has faith in Jesus freed you from that fear?*
- *Verse 4 begins, “Since you are precious and honored in my sight, and because I love you.” Do you have a family, good workplace or some other place where you feel precious and honored? How can you take in the fact that you are precious and honored by God?*

Thursday, January 26 – Read Mark 6:34-52. Scary situation #1: a large crowd was hungry. The disciples said, “Send them to get food,” but Jesus said, “You give them something to eat.” Then his power provided lots of food for them to share. Scary situation #2: a strong wind blew across the Sea of Galilee. The disciples were struggling. Jesus came and said “Do not be afraid,” and stopped the wind. The disciples were amazed. Both episodes gave insight into human fear and heavenly sufficiency.

- *Our sanctuary seats about 300. Imagine facing twenty times that many hungry people and Jesus says, “You give them something to eat”! Jesus gave the disciples the privilege of serving as a channel through which his power could feed the crowd. How is God calling you to be conduit through which God’s power can work?*
- *In your own words, how would you state the lesson(s) the disciples could have learned if they had understood about the loaves? How can taking these stories seriously increase your freedom to lead a more hopeful,*

worry-free life?

Friday, January 27 – Read Luke 12:22-32. We may not face marching armies, or huge crowds who need food. But every day we face cars that wear out, bills that need to be paid, and the question of “What’s for lunch?” Jesus asked us not to worry about those things. Even in this world, he said, those needs are usually met, for the birds and for us. But he sought to raise our sights beyond this world, saying, “Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.”

- What would it look like if you applied Jesus’ wisdom (“life is more than food, and the body more than clothes”) to your everyday activities? What would rise higher on your list of priorities, and what might drop to a lower rung? Do you believe that changing your priorities in that way would increase or decrease your worries?
- In light of modern medical research, consider the irony and insight of Jesus’ question: “Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life?” Worry shortens our lives! How can you distinguish between wise planning and excessive worry?

Saturday, January 28 – Read Isaiah 30:15-18. In Isaiah’s day, the Assyrian Empire threatened Israel from the north. King Hezekiah was worried and sent emissaries southwest to ask Egypt for help. It was futile—Assyria’s army was far stronger than Egypt’s. On God’s behalf, Isaiah pleaded with Israel to turn back from these missions. Trust in God, who loves you and longs to show you mercy, he begged. There’s no help in Egypt’s swift horses. Instead “in repentance and rest is your salvation.”

- Make this Scripture personal. Have there been times when God could have said to you, “In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength,” but you would have none of it? To what extent are you willing to lay aside striving and worry, and live in quietness and trust? Do you believe Isaiah’s words apply to your life: “The LORD longs to be gracious to you....Blessed are all who wait for him”?

Family Activity: Ask each person to share one or two worries from daily life. Ask everyone else to just listen—not to try and take the worries away. Read Matthew 5:25-27, 34. Choose to spend some quiet time together with your family. Maybe you want to bundle up and take a brief walk. You might each want to spend some time reading. Maybe you prefer listening to music. Encourage everyone to ask God to calm their hearts and fill them with peace during their quiet time. Also ask each

person to find a word or item during the quiet time that will help him or her carry that peace every day. Share your experiences as a family and pray God's peace for one another.