

Series - Unhindered

#2 Get Unshackled from the Weight of Anxiety

1 Peter 5:7; Matthew 6:25-34

Introduction: Turn with me to 1 Peter 5:7; Stand with me and let's all read this together. *"Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you."* (NIV)

PRAYER

Last Sunday I began a series of messages based on our vision for this year – "UNHINDERED."

That word comes from the last two verses in the book of Acts, chapter 28, verses 30-31 in the KJV says, *"And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him, 31preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him."*

The last four words in the KJV says—'*no man forbidding him,*' translate into one word in the original language. It is the adverb... "**UNHINDERED.**"

In the New American Standard Bible (NASB) it reads, *"Now Paul stayed two full years in his own rented lodging and welcomed all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching things about the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered."*

Last week we took a journey through the book of Acts, which is the story of the early church, and I pointed out [Five Characteristics of an Unhindered Church](#). An unhindered church is a praying church, a powerful church, a pure church, a persecuted church, and a praising church.

The church is the people, you, and I; and if the church is to be unhindered, we need to be personally free from the things that hinder us.

"UN" is a prefix used in English to form verbs expressing a reversal of some action or state, (unbend; uncork; unfasten, etc.), or to intensify the force of a verb already having such a meaning (unloose). Today's message is:

Get Unshackled from the Weight of Anxiety

In his book *Anxiety Free*, psychologist Robert Leahy points out that **"the average child today exhibits the same level of anxiety as the average psychiatric patient in the 1950s."**

Symptoms of anxiety are usually described as fear, nervousness, irritability, sleeplessness, and feeling overwhelmed, breathing difficulties, chest pain, concentration problems, digestive issues, headaches, insomnia, muscle tension, and low energy. Anxiety can even cause disturbing and obsessive thoughts, memory loss, and forgetfulness.

Anxiety can have a strong effect on your emotions. It can overwhelm and alter the serotonin and dopamine systems of the brain. It can show up as agitation, anger, and a general sense of annoyance that makes you feel moody, lonely, and sad. Anxiety can cause body odor, hair loss, and excess armpit sweat. [?]

For some people, anxiety is more likely to take the form of physical symptoms. It can cause blood pressure and circulation problems, hormone imbalance, hypertension, migraines, and weight gain or weight loss. Name pretty much anything bad, and anxiety can get it done. After presenting his research on the prevalence of anxiety, Dr. Leahy concluded, **"We live in the Age of Anxiety. We've become a nation of nervous wrecks."**

To one degree or another, anxiety is a weight we all carry. For some this weight is crushing, and for others it's merely annoying. Some people are diagnosed with anxiety disorder. Others have trouble sleeping because they can't stop thinking about everything they need to get done.

Wherever you are on the anxiety spectrum, God wants to unshackle you from the weight you've been carrying. Imagine feeling strong, loose, and free rather than straining under a burden.

As the early church community grew, followers of Christ felt stressed out and overwhelmed. Jesus's disciple Peter, once a fisherman and now a leader, wrote to encourage them as they faced the prospect of arrest and execution under the emperor Nero.

Peter begins his letter by addressing his readers as **"God's elect, exiles scattered throughout the provinces "** (1 Pet. 1:1). They've been driven out of their homes; many of them are living as refugees. They've lost their jobs.

Their possessions have been seized, and they've been separated from friends and

family. That's a lot of weight they're carrying. They don't know how much farther they can go under the stress. Here's what Peter says to them: **"Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you."** (1 Peter 5:7, NIV)

Perhaps you've seen the little flyer that says, "So far today, God, I've done alright. I haven't gossiped, I haven't lost my temper. I haven't been grumpy or nasty or selfish. But in a few minutes God, I'm going to get out of bed, and from then on, I'm probably going to need a lot of help.

As someone said, "I have so many troubles that if anything happens to me today it will be two weeks before I can get around to worrying about it."

- The ignorant worry because they don't know enough.
- The knowledgeable worry because they know too much.
- The rich worry because they are afraid of losing what they have.
- The poor worry because they don't have enough.
- The old worry because they are facing death.
- The young worry because they are facing life.
- Parents worry about the children they have
- Childless couples worry about the children they don't have
- 40% of what you worry about will never happen
- 30% of what you worry about, are things from the past and can't be changed
- 10% of what we worry about are insignificant issues
- 12% of what we worry about are health issues that will not happen
- **This means that 92% of what we fear or worry about will never take place**

The most difficult command in the Bible is not any of the Ten Commandments; it's Phil. 4:6. . . ***don't worry about anything but pray about everything.***"

If you feel overwhelmed by anxiety and fear, here's what you do: cast all your anxiety on God. Sounds easy. Problem solved. Right? If you are shackled by the weight of anxiety, a verse like this doesn't help. It feels a bit naïve and dismissive; and comes off as simplistic and ignorant.

But what if you really believed that last part of this verse, that the God of all creation cares about you?

Whether or not you see this verse as impotent or powerful depends on what you

believe about God. Do you believe he cares? Do you believe God can be trusted? Peter himself had some moments in life when he wasn't so sure.

In Mark, chapter 4, we read about Jesus putting his disciples in a boat and instructing them to go to the other side of the lake. Suddenly a huge storm comes up, waves start splashing, and the boat starts filling with water. Remember, several of the disciples are fishermen; they've weathered a few storms. But this one is different, and the Bible tells us they're terrified.

As it keeps getting worse, they notice that Jesus is sleeping in the stern or the back of the boat, on a cushion. Panicked, the disciples start shaking Jesus to wake up and here's the question they ask him: **"Don't you care if we drown?"** (Mark 4:38).

For some of you, that's exactly the question you would ask Jesus right now: **"Don't you care?"** If you care, then why did you allow us to get in this boat? Why did you allow us to buy this house? Move to this town? Take this job? Get married? If you care, you wouldn't be sleeping. Don't you care that we're drowning? In debt? In bitterness? In loneliness? In disappointment?

Peter and the other disciples struggle to believe that God cares, because they're doing what we often do, measuring God's concern for us by how big our storm is.

When you see the word **cast** in Peter's writing, and remember that Peter was a fisherman, you might think he's using his own career lingo to describe what we need to do with our anxieties. If that's what he's saying, how helpful can it be, because in fishing you cast the line out, but then you reel it back in.

Just so you know, the word **"cast"** isn't a fishing term. It's used one other time in Scripture, and it's interpreted as **"transfer the weight."**

So, when Peter says to cast your anxiety on the Lord, he doesn't say to release it; he says to transfer it. Let God carry the weight that has been holding you back and keeping you down.

There are different kinds of anxieties that you need to transfer over to God.

1. Don't be anxious about the UNKNOWN!

So much of the anxiety that seems to paralyze us and keep us from moving forward revolves around the *what ifs*. What if there's a shooting at my child's school? What if the economy collapses? What if I never find someone to spend my life with? What if I lose my job? What if I don't get accepted?

Soren Kierkegaard wrote a small book called *The Concept of Anxiety*. There's one line in there that pops up in psychology and philosophy discussions: "**Anxiety is the dizziness of freedom.**"

For the record, he's not talking about the kind of freedom we have in Christ; freedom from guilt and sin doesn't make us anxious. Kierkegaard refers to the freedom of possibilities in life, those times when our head is spinning with possibilities. We wish Jesus would show up and tell us what to do. Instead, Jesus tells us what not to do. "**Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own**" (Matt. 6:34).

A lot of our anxieties fall under the category of tomorrow. At the end of Jesus' remarks about worry in Matthew 6, Jesus goes right to the heart of what worry is all about. **Worry is about later. Worry is about the future**; what you will eat, what you will drink, what you will wear. Jesus points out that what people worried about 2000 years ago, they still worry about today.

Jesus re-labels all of your worries by just calling it "tomorrow." He says, "**is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes?** In other words, **Isn't your life more important than what you worry about?**"

The problem with worrying about the future is simply this - you are acting like either there is no God, or if there is, He is powerless. What you are saying is, "I don't really believe that God can do what He says He will do, and I don't really believe that God will take care of me."

Worry always indicates that you have a misunderstanding of what God is like. If I misunderstand what He's like then I can't trust Him, and if I don't trust Him, then I'm going to worry. So, the issue really is not that you're worried, it's just we

doubt God's love and His word to us.

Worry Is Unchristian. When you worry you are acting like an atheist. You're acting as if God won't do what He's promised to do. Non-believers have a right to worry, but Christians are different. We don't have to worry because we have a Heavenly Father who says, "I will supply all your needs."

Three times in Matthew 6, verses 25, 31 and 34 Jesus repeats a phrase, ***"Therefore, do not be anxious."***

The Greek word for "anxious" or what we would call "worry" is a combination of two smaller words. One word means "to divide" and the other word means "the mind." **In other words, to worry is to have a divided mind.**

There are two things you should never worry about.

1. Never worry about things you can change. If you are worried about something you can change, instead of worrying, change it.

2. Never worry about things you can't change. If you can't change it don't worry about it? Pray about it.

Worry is fear's extravagance. Worry is faith in the negative, trust in the unpleasant, assurance of disaster and belief in defeat...worry is wasting today's time to clutter up tomorrow's opportunities with yesterday's troubles.

Jesus had to reassure the disciples repeatedly. In fact, it was during Jesus' last big talk with them before His arrest, trial, and crucifixion that Jesus says in John 14:1; ***"Do not let your hearts be troubled,*** [And then he goes right to the heart of what causes us to worry] you believe in God; believe (trust) also in me." The issue of worry is faith. Do we trust God or not?

He goes on to say in John 14:27; ***"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."*** (NIV)

Don't be anxious about the UNKNOWN, and

2. Don't be anxious about the UNLIKELY!

Some of what is known is possible but extremely unlikely. We live in a world of twenty-four-hour news. We can learn about catastrophes almost the second they happen. No waiting until the nightly news.

“For with much wisdom comes much sorrow, the more knowledge, the more grief.” (Eccles. 1:18).

SOME anxiety is based on "fake news."

- Weapon-toting clowns go on murderous rampage created national anxiety. Which led to another fake news story.
- Congress passes law authorizing citizens to legally shoot and kill suspicious clowns.
- Elderly woman accused of training her sixty-five cats to steal from the neighbors. Now you can feel anxious when a stray cat wanders into your yard.

[personal story of childhood and Komodo dragon]

There is so much fake news, but if we believe it, the anxiety is still real.

Don't be anxious about the UNKNOWN, don't be anxious about the UNLIKELY...

3. Don't be anxious about the UNCONTROLLABLE!

Most of our anxiety comes from situations and people we can't control. An expert in the field of stress, Dr. Edward Hallowell, gives this equation for anxiety: **"A heightened sense of vulnerability and a diminished sense of power."** When I read that equation, I think about our kids.

Someone said: I realized that while children are like dogs, loyal and affectionate, lick your face...teenagers are cats. It's so easy to be a life-long dog owner. You feed it, you train it, and boss it around.

It puts its head on your knee and gazes at you as if you were a prized painting. It bounds indoors with enthusiasm when you call it.

Then around age eleven or twelve, your adoring little puppy turns into a cat. When you call it to come inside it looks amazed as if wondering who died and made you emperor. Instead of coming in, it disappears. You won't see it again until it gets hungry. When you reach out to ruffle its head in an affectionate gesture, it twists away from you and gives you a blank stare as if trying to remember who you are.

And you, not realizing that the dog is now a cat, think something must be desperately wrong. They seem so anti-social, distant, and even delusional about the way of life you've taught them. And since you're the one who raised them, taught them to fetch and stay and sit on command; you assume that you did something wrong. Flooded with guilt and fear, you redouble your efforts to make your pet behave. Only now you're dealing with a cat.

Everything that worked before now produces the opposite of the desired result. You call them and they run away. You tell them to sit, and they jump on the furniture. The more you go toward them the more they move away. Instead of continuing to act like a dog owner you must learn to behave like a cat owner. Put a dish of food near the door and let them come to you. Sit still and they will come, seeking that warm, comforting lap that it has not forgotten. One day your grown child will walk into the kitchen, give you a big kiss and say, "Thanks for all you've done for me – I love you."

You've probably heard of the Serenity Prayer. It's often used to help people in recovery, and it goes like this: **"God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."** That last part is where the anxiety seeps in, not knowing the difference.

Maybe you feel anxious about finances. There are some things about your financial situation that you can change but other things you can't.

Maybe you feel anxious about your health. There are some things you can control, but other things you can't.

Many people feel anxious about our country, the election, the environment, the influx of illegal aliens, and other political hot topics. Can I just say, as lovingly as I

can, STOP WORRYING! Do your part, be a good citizen, a good neighbor, vote, care for the widows and orphans, give to the poor.

Don't hear what I'm not saying. Proverbs 29:2 says, ***"When those who are right with God rule, the people are glad, but when a sinful man rules, the people have sorrow."*** (New Life Version)

We should always support and vote for those who are right with God, if there are any. Remember our vision is based on Paul, in Rome, where Nero, a persecutor of Christians, is Caesar; yet Paul is living in a rented home for two years, preaching the gospel unhindered.

Eventually Paul was executed. But the point is no matter where you live or who gets elected, and what path our country takes or does to solve problems. We're going to be ok. God's people are going to be ok.

In Luke 1, the angel said, ***"Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. 31You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. 32He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, 33and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."***

As a Christ-follower, I'm part of a kingdom that will never end. Psalm 34:17-19 says, ***"The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles. 18The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.19The righteous person may have many troubles, but the Lord delivers him from them all."*** (NIV)

In Philippians 4:6-7, Paul wrote, ***"Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."*** (NIV)

In an article called "Surviving Anxiety," Scott Stossel shares some of his journey in dealing with anxiety.

He writes: Here's what I've tried to deal with my anxiety: individual psychotherapy, family therapy, group therapy, cognitive-behavioral therapy,

rational emotive behavior therapy, acceptance and commitment therapy, hypnosis, meditation, role-playing, exposure therapy, massage therapy, self-help workbooks, prayer, acupuncture, yoga, Stoic philosophy, and audiotapes I ordered off a late-night TV infomercial. And lots of medications. Also: beer, wine, gin, bourbon, vodka, and scotch. Here's what's worked: **nothing.**"

I'm not putting down professional help; but Peter doesn't mention pills or priests or psychiatrists. He says to cast our anxiety on God. **How do we do it?**

Like so many other verses in the bible, we tend to quote them as stand-alone statements of inspiration. But we need to add 1 Peter 5:6 to put this verse in context: ***"Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you."*** (1 Pet. 5:6-7; NIV)

The NIV puts a period between the two sentences when it should be a comma. The ***"cast your anxiety"*** portion is the end of a complete thought that begins by ***"humbling ourselves."*** This changes things. We humble ourselves by casting our anxieties on him. And when we cast our anxieties on him, we are humbling ourselves. Peter is making a connection between pride and anxiety.

1. Pride makes me self-centered.

The more self-centered I am, the more I'm concerned about my own desires, pleasures, and comfort, the more anxious I'm going to feel.

Think about our current cultural obsession with social media. It can be an amazingly efficient tool for staying up to date with family, reconnecting with old friends, networking, and even ministry. But there's a lot of research about how the rise of social media coincides with an enormous rise in anxiety.

Why? It causes us to obsess about our lives, our image, and how others perceive us. Constantly taking selfies throughout the day isn't a helpful antidote for anxiety. Social media has a way of reinforcing anxiety because it causes us to compare ourselves with others.

FOMO, (fear of missing out) is increasingly cited as a source of anxiety for young adults. We feel anxious when we see things our friends are doing without us. 24

hours a day, you can be reminded of what you're missing.

2. Pride refuses to ask for help.

So much of our anxiety results from the refusal to humble ourselves and ask God, or anyone, for help. We feel like giving up because we've insisted on carrying the weight on our own.

Maybe there's a lot of stress in your home because of problems in your family. Have you gotten on your knees and humbled yourself before God and asked for His help? Don't think of it as an admission of defeat. Think of it as a transfer of your anxiety to God.

3. Pride has control issues.

We talked about an anxiety that comes from the uncontrollable, but why would controlling bring so much anxiety? Because of pride. Pride keeps us awake at night going over how to control what's making us anxious. Humility acknowledges that our control is limited. It surrenders those things to God.

Pride tries to take control; humility trusts that God cares and is capable.

Pride makes me defensive, so I become anxious when I'm criticized.

Pride makes me selfish, so I feel anxious when I don't get my way.

Pride makes me stubborn, so I get anxious when others don't agree with me.

Pride makes me jealous, so I become anxious when someone else has success.

Pride makes me critical; I get anxious if someone doesn't listen to my advice.

Peter understands how this works. He says to cast our anxiety on God by coming humbly before him.

Worship is a powerful antidote to anxiety because worship and worry aren't compatible with each other.

When we worship God, we are reminded of his greatness and power, and we naturally begin to cast the weight of our anxieties on him.

Paul writes, *"Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus"* (Phil. 4:6-7).

In our prayers we often tell God about our anxieties but never get around to telling our anxieties about God. When our prayers are filled with thanksgiving, we are telling our anxieties what we are thankful for.

David models this for us in his psalms. He might begin by talking about the reasons he has to be anxious: **his enemies are chasing him. His life is in danger. The guilt of his sin is too heavy.** But then there's a shift. It happens in nearly every psalm. David stops telling God about his anxieties and starts telling his anxieties about God: **God can defeat my enemies. God can rescue me from danger. God can take away the guilt of my sin.**

So, we've looked at what Jesus said about worry, what Paul said about fear, and what Peter said about anxiety. Do you see the common theme?

All of them teach that the only thing strong enough to overpower worry, fear, and anxiety is a relationship with God.

CONCLUSION:

IF WE COULD RECEIVE A LETTER FROM GOD ON THE SUBJECT OF ANXIETY, it would sound something like this...I am God. Today I will be handling all your problems. Please remember that I do not need your help. If the devil happens to deliver a situation to you that you cannot handle, DO NOT attempt to resolve it. Kindly put it in the SFJTD (Something For Jesus To Do) box.

Once the matter is placed into the box, do not hold on to it or attempt to remove it. If it is a situation that you think you are capable of handling, please consult me in prayer to be sure that is the proper assumption. Because I do not sleep or slumber, there is no need for you to lose any sleep.

Jesus is...

Help for the helpless,
Love for the loveless.
and strength for the weak.
He is rest for the trying,
Peace for the crying.
And Hope for the dying,

God desires to unshackle you from anxiety. He desires to set you free. What weight do you need to transfer over to God TODAY? "***Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you***" (1 Pet. 5:7).

If the load you are carrying has become too heavy, if the anxieties of this life have weighed you down, if you're tired and ready to give up-God sees the load you carry and the weight you're under, and he asks, "Why don't you let me carry that for you?"