



Our Anxious Thoughts

Charles F. Stanley - In Touch Ministries



*For everything,
a season,
and in everything,
prayer.*



SEASONS OF PRAYER

WALKING ON THE WATERS OF FAITH

“LORD, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water,” said Peter (Matt. 14:28). Jesus beckons Peter to join Him on the water, and for one wild moment he does. But as Peter looks around, fear of his circumstances overtakes his faith, and he begins to sink. Jesus pulls him from the raging sea and asks, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?” (v. 31).

Each day, Jesus invites us to join Him on the waters of faith. But too often we allow our doubts, fears, and anxieties to turn our eyes away from Him and onto ourselves. *What will I do? What will they think of me? I feel so ... I don't know what to do ... Ah!*

As these anxious thoughts multiply, we have a choice: to frantically search for answers in our environment, with our friends and family, and in ourselves, or to do as Jesus taught the disciples—to seek God and His kingdom first (Matt. 6:33). Instead of thoughts that distract us from the One who actually has the answers, we fill our mind with faith-building questions like, *What does God want me to do today? What does He want from me? What decisions does He want me to make?*

The waves of “what ifs” and worst-case scenarios subside in the wake of God’s sovereignty, guidance, and love. That’s why we’ve compiled this booklet full of Dr. Stanley’s teachings on overcoming anxious thoughts. We hope the Lord uses this booklet to help you overcome seasons of fear and anxiety in your life—and teaches you to walk on the waters of faith with your Savior.

From your friends at
In Touch Ministries

MATTHEW 6:25-34

“For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they? And who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life? And why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you? You of little faith! Do not worry then, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear for clothing?’ For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”

A WORLD OF TROUBLES

We live in an age of anxiety. Whether it's personal concerns, family matters, financial needs, health issues, governmental policies, or global conditions, we all have reasons to worry and fret. Sometimes critical situations strike immediate fear in our hearts, and that is only natural. However, much of our anxiety is associated with everyday problems. We take our worries to bed with us, wake up with them, and carry them around with us all day. This is not how God wants us to live. He can settle our hearts in such a way that we can live with the stresses of life yet still experience His peace and joy.

Anxiety is not just a contemporary problem. It was also an issue for those who lived in Old Testament times. Psalm 37:7-8 says, "Rest in the LORD and wait patiently for Him; do not fret." By the time the Roman Empire ruled the world, there were plenty of reasons for anxiety. When Jesus came on the scene, He addressed the issue of worry in His sermon in Matthew 6:25-34. His solutions sound so simple, yet we still struggle to apply them.

Anxiety is a condition in which the mind is being pulled in two directions. This results in an emotional state of distress that dominates our thoughts and disrupts our sleep. It could be fueled by present circumstances or fear of what could happen in the future. It's basically a reaction to our circumstances, but it's also a choice. Instead of giving in to worry, we can cast all our anxiety on the Lord because He cares for us (1 Pet. 5:7). 

THE CAUSES OF ANXIETY

In Jesus' sermon in Matthew 6, He points out why we so often give in to worry and what we can do to change our response:



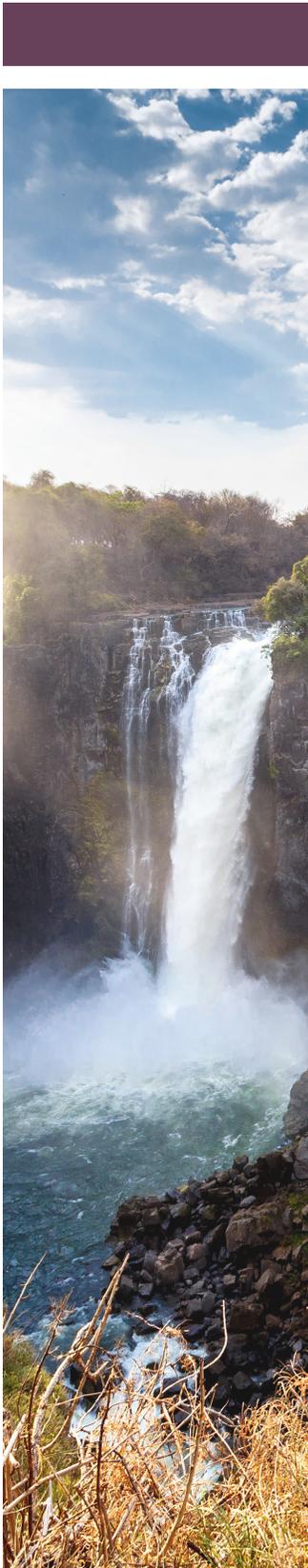
1. **FEELINGS OF INADEQUACY.** Problems can so overwhelm us that we feel insignificant and incapable of doing anything about them. But Jesus advises us to “look at the birds” (v. 26). They seem so small and inconsequential, yet God takes upon Himself the responsibility to feed them. We never see birds planting seeds or harvesting crops. They are totally inadequate for that task and can’t even hold a hoe or shovel. If God cares so much for them, we can be certain that He will be faithful to meet our needs as well.

2. **OUR ATTEMPT TO CHANGE THINGS WE CANNOT CONTROL.** Jesus reminds us that many situations are beyond our ability to alter. “And who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life?” (v. 27). Whenever we encounter circumstances we cannot change, the only wise option is to turn them over to the only one who can handle them—God. When we try to control them, we are demonstrating unbelief and multiplying the intensity of our pain and frustration.

3. **OUR FAILURE TO TRUST GOD TO PROVIDE FOR OUR NEEDS.** After explaining how the Lord clothes the lilies of the field with more glory than even King Solomon, Jesus exhorts us not to worry about clothing because He will provide whatever we need (vv. 28–30). When we worry that our needs won’t be met, we demonstrate a lack of faith in God. Part of our problem is that we don’t know what our needs truly are. Sometimes the situation may look like the Lord has let us down, but in reality, He’s supplying a need that we may not even know we have. When the apostle Paul suffered so much mistreatment and hardship, Scripture never records him complaining about his circumstances. Shipwrecks and beatings were not happy times for Paul, but he endured them with inner peace and confidence because he knew and trusted the Lord.

4. **MISPLACED PRIORITIES.** Instead of focusing on obtaining the necessities of life, Jesus tells us to “seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you” (v. 33). God’s kingdom is His rule and authority over our lives, and His righteousness is Christ’s character worked out in us in such a way that we reflect Him. When we make it our top priority to acknowledge Him as our Lord and Savior, seeking to walk obediently in His ways, God promises to supply whatever else we need. He knows exactly what is best for us, as well as how and when to provide it.

5. **TRYING TO LIVE TOMORROW TODAY.** Planning ahead is good, but sometimes our overloaded calendars lead to an overwhelming sense of time pressure. Jesus tells us, “So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own” (v. 34). Instead of becoming anxious about our responsibilities and commitments, we should turn our schedules over to God. If we’ll wake up each morning with our thoughts on the Lord, committing ourselves to do whatever He says, we’ll be able to go through the day with peace and joy as we watch Him work out everything.



To overcome worry, we ought to adopt an attitude of joy and thankfulness. Paul wrote his letter to the Philippians from a cold, damp Roman prison cell, yet he continually spoke about rejoicing. Instead of being anxious, he advised the Philippians to pray about everything with thanksgiving (4:6-7). There are so many things for which we can thank God—that He walks with us through hard times, He protects and provides, and He always keeps His promises. When we focus on these things, God’s peace guards our hearts and minds in Christ, Jesus no matter how difficult our circumstances may be.

The call of God never takes us where the grace of God cannot sustain us. He has promised to meet all our needs and to guard us with His peace and joy. The choice is ours: We can either live with mistrust and anxiety or trust the Lord to provide and watch over us. He has all the power to meet our needs and the omniscience to know what’s best. It may not be what we’d prefer, but His ways are always right, and His motive is always love. 🌿

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STRENGTH FOR TODAY

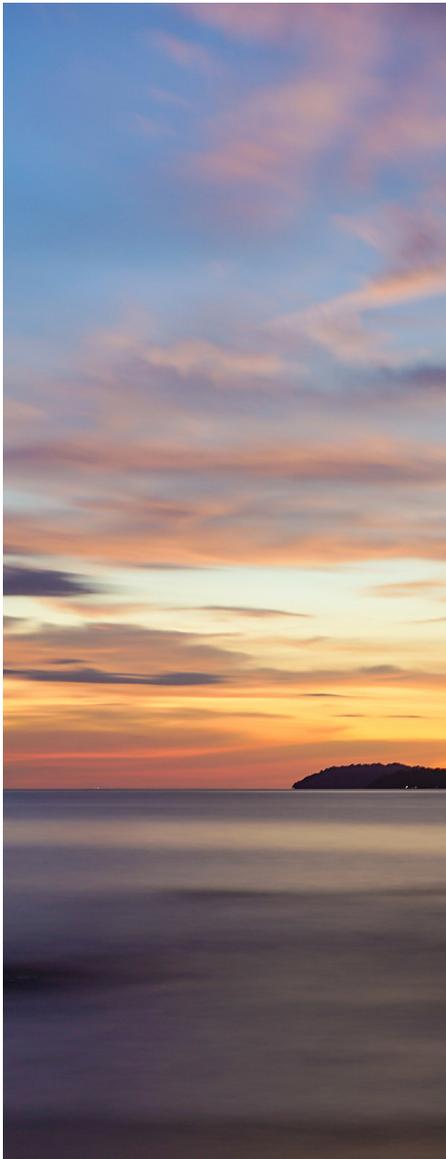
All believers need encouragement in the difficult seasons of life. Many times, that strength may come from another person—maybe a friend or just someone who cares enough to get involved. But other times, nobody is available. Perhaps no one is on your side of a conflict. Or maybe the situation is simply too personal to share with anyone else. And sometimes a wound is so deep it can only be healed alone in God’s presence.

That’s why it’s important that you and I know how to encourage ourselves spiritually. Although we need fellowship, the foundation

**WHEN MY ANXIOUS THOUGHTS
MULTIPLY WITHIN ME, YOUR
CONSOLATIONS DELIGHT MY SOUL.**

PSALM 94:19 (NIV)

of the Christian life is a personal relationship with God. Every believer should know how to find encouragement directly from the Lord.



David knew how to encourage himself in the Lord (1 Sam. 30:1-20). Before he became king, David had a falling-out with King Saul, who was jealous of David's success in battle. Six hundred warriors had sided with David and settled together in a town called Ziklag. Returning home one day, the men found their town burned, their livestock and possessions stolen, and their wives and children taken captive by the Amalekites. In their anger and grief, the men turned against David, blaming him for their loss. They began to talk of stoning him.

David was truly alone. No one was available for consolation and advice. With his own home burned and his family taken, he could have just slipped into despondency and given up. However, this leader had a history with God. He had seen the Lord's faithfulness again and again: when he faced King Saul, the giant Goliath, and warriors from other nations. So David turned to the Lord for strength (1 Sam. 30:6) and found the encouragement he needed.

David also asked the Lord for direction. God revealed to David that he should lead his men to pursue the Amalekites and promised he would be victorious (1 Sam. 30:8). And that's exactly what happened. David and his men defeated their enemy and recovered their wives, children, possessions, and livestock. Because David sought the Lord for encouragement and guidance, God brought him successfully through the trial. 🌿

05

THE PEACE OF GOD'S PRESENCE

Life is rarely predictable. Our circumstances constantly fluctuate. People fall short of our expectations. But amid the daily ups and downs, we have a God who is reliable, stable, and trustworthy. The following are some ways we can find peace, faith, and hope through His presence during our daily struggles:

1. **BE QUIET BEFORE THE LORD.**

Oftentimes, when we get into difficult situations, we want to make a quick decision to relieve the pressure. When we take time to wait on God, the anger, greed, or resentment we feel has time to dissipate. Then we have time to consider our response instead of simply reacting to a stressful situation.

The Lord wants us to run to Him in times of adversity. Martin Luther, one of the fathers of the Protestant Reformation, understood this principle. His hymn “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God” praises the Father for being a faithful refuge and emphasizes the importance of depending on Him to experience spiritual victory. When you and I fail to wait on God, we will usually fail to rely on Him.

2. **ASK FOR GOD’S GUIDANCE.**

Seek the Lord about your dilemma. There is no such thing as a predicament too complex for God. He knows ahead of time what problems you will face, and He knows exactly how best to handle them. Any time you and I are willing to acknowledge our inadequacy and seek His guidance and direction for our lives, He will be sure to answer. Matthew 7:7 says, “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.” If answers are slow in coming, make sure your heart is clean, then continue to seek His will. If we are walking in obedience, He will be faithful to guide us.

SEEK HELP: IF YOU CONTINUE TO BATTLE TROUBLESOME THOUGHTS, DON'T BE AFRAID TO REACH OUT FOR HELP. SEEK THE HELP OF A COUNSELOR, PASTOR, OR PERHAPS A DOCTOR TO SEE IF YOU MAY HAVE A PHYSICAL ISSUE REQUIRING MEDICAL ATTENTION. GOD OFTEN WORKS THROUGH THE HANDS OF OTHER PEOPLE TO ANSWER OUR PRAYERS. RECALL GOD'S HELP IN THE PAST.

3. **OPEN GOD’S WORD.**

Sometimes we may not sense any direction from the Lord until we read His Word. He may use a passage you have read many times before, or He may lead you to something new. Once God has revealed His will to us, we must be faithful to obey, even if we don't understand or agree with Him. Too often we question God's leadership and don't obey because we trust our own abilities and wisdom instead of His. The Creator of the universe is available to guide and counsel us; our responsibility is to listen and obey.

4. RECALL GOD'S HELP IN THE PAST.

One of the most powerful ways to encourage yourself is to remember how the Lord has been faithful to you in the past. When I joined First Baptist Atlanta, a church-wide conflict arose. The first time it happened, I hid in the back under the balcony. When something similar happened years later, I sat up front beside the pulpit. I remembered how God delivered me in the first battle, and I believed He would give me victory again.

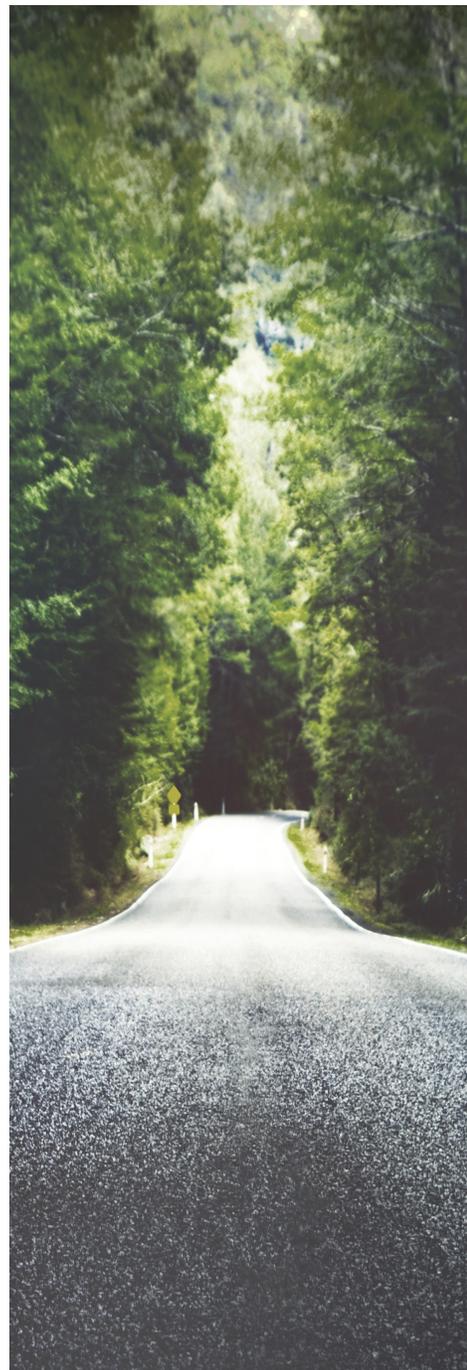
When people forget their history, they make the same mistakes over and over. So make a practice of recording how God brings you through difficulties. Teach your loved ones to do the same. The Father doesn't change. He was faithful to bring you through past trials, and He will lead you and guide you through future ones as well.

5. OBEY GOD.

The Lord may ask you to do something that doesn't make sense from a worldly perspective. Financially, it might not be the most profitable choice. Or it may seem foolish. But if we seek to please people instead of God, we are asking for trouble. In contrast, when we choose to obey the Lord, we can trust He will work all things together for our good. Obedience always brings blessing.

6. TAKE TIME TO DO WHAT YOU LOVE.

It's important for us to enjoy recreation, hobbies, and leisure. When my heart is heavy, sometimes an afternoon of photography is just what I need. You might think, *That doesn't sound very spiritual, Dr. Stanley.* But it is. God wants us to be joyful Christians, people who take time to enjoy the good things He has given us. Of course, that doesn't mean we will never experience pain. However, in the midst of our struggles, we can have an underlying joy because we know we are God's children. When life's struggles bring you down, allow yourself time for wholesome recreation. 🌿





A PRAYER TO CALM AN ANXIOUS HEART

DEAR HEAVENLY FATHER,

When we are tossed to and fro on the seas of daily life, You are our North Star, guiding us and keeping us on course. You lead us the way we ought to go and supply our every need. We need not rely on our own strength or wisdom—there is no way we could ever be prepared enough for the future, because we don't know what the future holds. But You do. In Your Word, You constantly remind us of how You have cared for Your children, and You promise to do the same for us. You have given each of us special gifts, talents, and desires, and when we follow You, You use them for Your glory and eternal purpose. We thank You that it's not all up to us—it's up to You. You only require our faithfulness. So when we start looking at the rolling seas of uncertainty that threaten to take us down, we will turn our eyes back to You—the One who calms the seas, and our hearts. Amen.



THERE'S MORE

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