

**KAILUA CHRISTIAN CHURCH**  
**Sunday Worship, May 26, 2024**  
**Rev. Irene Willis Hassan**  
**Sermon: Research Based Anxiety Relief**  
**Scripture: Matthew 6:25-34**

**Matthew 6:25-34**

**25** “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? **26** Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? **27** Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life[e]?”

**28** “And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. **29** Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. **30** If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? **31** So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ **32** For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. **33** But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. **34** Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

**Sermon: Research Based Anxiety Relief**

I wanted to talk to you about anxiety today because I sense there’s some anxiety among all of your right now. Some of us have very heavy things happening in our personal lives. Some of our beloved friends and community members are experiencing terminal illnesses and the fear and disappointment of watching these valuable lives come to an end can be overwhelming. We also may be experiencing some collective anxiety on the eve of our new programs that include being caretakers for three young women coming from the mainland.

We all have fears and anxieties, because life has taught us that the world isn’t always safe. Medication is helpful for short term anxiety. But for folks who suffer from chronic long term anxiety, medication isn’t enough. The medications used for anxiety cause a variety of issues, including dependence and addiction. Therapists give us great tools to help with anxiety that I personally use with my kids when they’re spinning out, such as the “5,4,3,2,1” method or deep breathing exercises.

However, these tools are, like medication, useful to soothe an acute anxiety episode rather than treat the overall disposition of anxiousness. If a person has chronic and omnipresent anxiety, it’s usually recommended that they seek cognitive behavioral therapy, or “talk therapy”, to get to the root of what is causing the anxiety.

I talk about therapy because my generation loves therapy – and for good reason, it’s a helpful tool for our mental health. Therapy and social work are predicated on measurements. Thousands of research studies have been done to create the best practices of taking care of our emotional wellbeing.

One topic that these studies repeatedly cover is the impact of religiosity on mental health, depression, and anxiety. Almost all of the dozens of studies done on this topic have concluded that people engaged with religious traditions and consistent spiritual practices are more likely to experience less anxiety, depression, and poor mental health than people who do not practice consistent religious and spiritual traditions.

We see the relationship between decline in religious adherence and the massive increase in anxiety related disorders in our world today. Anxiety, depression, and their accompanying drug overdoses are a literal epidemic in our society. We see it in ourselves, in our friends, and particularly in our younger generations. Studies show that anxiety and depression rates are soaring, especially among young people. Many factors contribute to this, but one powerful antidote often overlooked is the gift of faith.

Jesus tells us that God cares for us more than anything in the world and we need not worry. Our faith gifts us the knowledge that God is in control. This belief is more than a comforting thought; it's a transformative truth that reshapes how we perceive and handle our worries.

The relief from worry that Jesus offers is a profound gift. When we trust that God is in control, we free ourselves from the burden of trying to control everything. This does not mean we live carelessly or without responsibility, but it means we live with the assurance that God holds our lives in His hands.

One of the responsibilities of this gift of knowing that God is in control is the call to pass this gift onto others, especially in this time of epidemic anxiety and depression. Our faith and the peace it brings are not just gifts for us; they are gifts we can pass on to our children and younger generations. In a world where they face immense pressure and uncertainty, our example of trust in God can provide them with a foundation of stability and hope. By demonstrating that we do not have to carry our burdens alone, we offer them a powerful tool to combat anxiety and depression.

To pass on this gift of relief from anxiety through Jesus' assurance, I'm not asking you to give someone a lecture that if "they just had Jesus they wouldn't worry so much." That sort of language can be perceived as obnoxious and rude. Instead, live out your faith and how it heals your own anxiety. In times of difficulty, let your trust in God be visible. When others see you handling stress with a calm and trusting heart, they will be curious about the source of your peace.

Praying over others is also a healing gift of anxiety relief. I'll share with you a time I was feeling anxious and someone prayed over me and the impact it had: as a wedding gift, my father in law bought me eye surgery. Until I was 25 years old, I had terrible eyesight – my vision was -8.00. Without glasses or contact lenses, the world was a literal blur and it's one of the best worldly gifts I've ever been given to have these new eyes that see perfectly. However, the surgery and recovery were extraordinarily painful, especially since I didn't follow the post operation directions very well and got an awful infection in my eyes. I remember I was lying in bed screaming and crying (and the crying made it worse!) and my mother in law came in and laid her hands over my eyes and began reciting prayers over me. She sat there for a solid 15 minutes that way, her hands over my eyes, singing prayers to me in a gentle voice. I immediately fell asleep and woke up feeling much better.

I do the same for my daughter. She has a fear of the monster in her closet when she's trying to go to sleep. I often go into her room when she can't sleep and pray over her until she does, which is usually very shortly after I start praying.

When I'm on airplanes and my anxiety flares up (I hate planes!), I repeat Psalm 23 over and over in my head while using the therapeutic tools of deep breathing and mindfulness. Prayer, scripture, and religious traditions are powerful, research proven tools for anxiety relief.

Jesus tells us we need not be anxious because he's in control. That doesn't mean bad things don't happen. People die. Planes experience turbulence. Maybe there is a monster in the closet, who knows. Things will probably go wrong during our summer programs. Jesus doesn't stop bad things from happening, but has provided us important tools in our faith for getting through those moments. This gift encourages us to boldly move forward into continuing the work of growing this church. This gift encourages us to be better parents and friends by praying over our loved ones in their times of anxiety. The gift of faith literally saves our lives so that we don't succumb to addiction or crippling despair when those bad things do happen to us.

The younger generations love therapy, and therapy often recommends that religious practice alleviates anxiety. What a wonderful God we have that provides us this important gift.

Let us pray.

Jesus, we come before You with hearts full of gratitude, thanking You for Your boundless love and grace. You are our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in times of trouble. Today, we especially thank You for relieving our anxieties and gifting us with the precious gift of trust in You.

We are grateful for Your comforting words that remind us not to worry about our lives, what we will eat or drink, or about our bodies, what we will wear. Your assurances are a balm to our anxious hearts, and we are deeply thankful for the peace You provide.

Thank You for teaching us that we are much more valuable than the birds of the air and the lilies of the field, which You so beautifully care for. This knowledge reassures us of Your constant provision and unending love.

We praise You for the gift of trust that transforms our worry into faith. In a world full of uncertainties and fears, You remain our steady anchor. Thank You for holding us in Your hands and guiding us with Your wisdom and compassion.

Lord, we are also grateful that this gift of trust is something we can share with others, especially the younger generations who face immense pressures and anxieties. Help us to be examples of Your peace, and may our trust in You inspire them to seek and find the same comfort and assurance.

Jesus, we rest in the promise that You are always with us, calming our fears and lifting our burdens. We thank You for being our Savior, our protector, and our friend.

In Your holy and precious name, we pray.

Amen.