PREACHING & TEACHING

Sermon on Anxiety

Preaching notes on anxiety, written with the distinction that has to be made before anything else: an anxiety disorder is a medical condition and not a spiritual failure. Includes how to preach do not be anxious without turning a command into a source of shame.

topic notes · 4 segments

Topic notes. Movement one is not optional and should come before the text, not after it.

BEFORE YOU RECORD

- Say early and plainly that clinical anxiety is a medical condition, that treatment and medication are not a failure of faith, and that you would encourage anyone struggling to see their doctor. A congregation that has heard the opposite for years needs to hear the correction from the front.
- Do not build the sermon on your own mild worry. If you have not experienced it, say so, and draw on people who have rather than pretending.
- Keep contact details for local mental health support available after the service without making anyone ask for them publicly.

01. Before the text: the distinction

say this first

[the movement that decides whether the sermon helps or harms]

There is everyday worry, which most people have, and there is an anxiety disorder, which is a medical condition that responds to medical treatment. They are not the same thing and this sermon is mostly about the first.

If you are living with the second, nothing I say this morning is a substitute for a doctor, and taking medication for it is no more a failure of faith than taking insulin. I want to say that before we read anything, because I know some of you have been told otherwise.

02. Three texts, three costs

choose one

[1 Kings 19 is the one that treats the body first]

Philippians 4:4-7. Do not be anxious about anything. Handle the imperative carefully or it becomes an instruction people cannot obey.

Matthew 6:25-34. Consider the birds. Note that the argument is not that worry is wrong but that it is ineffective, which is a gentler and more persuasive line.

1 Kings 19:1-9. Elijah, exhausted and wanting to die, and what God does first is let him sleep and give him food. Twice. Before any conversation. The best passage in scripture on this subject and almost nobody preaches it.

03. The trap

avoid this

[the command that shames]

Do not be anxious, preached as a simple command, adds a second layer to anyone already anxious: now they are anxious and also failing. The text is not a switch and preaching it as one is the commonest damage done on this subject.

04. An angle worth taking

if you want it

[what Philippians actually instructs]

Philippians does not stop at the imperative. It gives something to do instead: in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests. The instruction is to move the thing out of your head and address it to someone, which is closer to what any competent therapist would suggest than most preachers realise.

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