Day 1

I'm reading up at the moment about 'Mindfulness', and looking at it from a Christian perspective. In particular I'm reading about becoming more 'mindful' can help with anxiety. It has made me realise how many anxious thoughts I have myself, but the words of Jesus come with fresh clarity and relevance: 'Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life... (Matt 6:25).' Not only is worry unhelpful it is unnecessary when you have a heavenly Father watching over you.

Day 2

It is a natural human response to be anxious, part of our instinctive reaction to perceived danger or threat, so we can never eliminate anxiety from our lives. We can however hand our concerns and worries over to God, and trust him with the outcome of our lives: 'Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, 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. (Philippians 4:6-7).' What stops prayer becoming just another form of worry is that, having shared our concerns with God, we then trust him for the outcome and express that trust in thankfulness that he has heard us.

Day 3

Sometimes we suffer from 'secondary anxiety', that is the care and concern we feel for those dear to us, like our children and grandchildren. This can be more intense because we feel so helpless to do anything for them. At such times we can remember the gracious invitation; 'Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you (1Peter 5:7).' Jesus is the great Burden Bearer. He wants to take not only our sins, but our sorrows, and our worries too. Let's not be hesitant to throw our cares onto him.

Day 4

One of the insights of Mindfulness is the importance of living in the present moment. This concurs with the teaching of an 18th Century Christian teacher called Jean Pierre de Caussade who spoke about 'the sacrament of the present moment'. This means we are to live in the here and now - neither in the past (which has gone), nor the future (which is not yet here), but in the present, where God is. Anxiety always seeks to drag us back to the past (regret) or haul us into the future (fearful anticipation of what might be). Peace can only be found in the present, and we must learn to be present to the PRESENT.

Day 5

Martha is a good example of someone overcome by anxiety. When Jesus and his disciples arrive at her home in Bethany she goes into a spin with all that she imagines she ought to do to make them welcome. Jesus compassionately describes her as 'worried and upset about many things'. I guess most of us have been there! His recommendation is that she join her sister Mary and sit at his feet to listen to his teaching. Taking time to sit and be still seems counterproductive when we are stressed and overwhelmed, but it marks the path to recovery and the restoration of emotional and mental well-being.

Day 6

Mindfulness emphasises the importance of breathing when it comes to freeing ourselves from anxious thoughts. Again, the Christian tradition has a long history of teaching 'breathing prayer', in particular by using The Jesus Prayer: 'Lord Jesus Christ (as you breath in), Son of God (as you breathe out), have mercy on me (breathe in), your child (breathe out.' If you pray this prayer slowly and meditatively it will help to calm your soul. You can pray it in the middle of the night when you wake up with anxious thoughts, even as you walk during the daytime. If you practise it regularly it will become part of you, and one of your instinctive defences against fear.

Day 7

One of the practices recommended in Mindfulness is that of meditation. In Christianity there is a long tradition of meditating on Scripture , and also of meditative singing. Here is a beautiful song that I have often used. As Jesus calmed the stormy seas, so he can calm our stormy hearts. May the peace of God, that passé all understanding, keep and guard our hearts this day.

Day 8

Mindfulness teachers emphasise that in overcoming anxious thoughts we must be compassionate towards ourselves - 'being opened to be moved by one's own suffering, experiencing feelings of caring and kindness towards oneself, taking an understanding, non-judgemental attitude towards one's inadequacies and failures, and recognizing that one's experience is part of the common human experience.' Many of us are highly self-critical and blame ourselves for feeling anxious in the first place. We become anxious about our anxiety!

The idea of self-compassion reminds us of the grace of God. We are deeply loved and cherished AS WE ARE, right now, in this moment. So why not show a little grace towards yourself today, even when you fail or fall? God will still be loving you and his power will still be available to lift you up.

Day 9

A final posting on Mindfulness from a Christian perspective. The goal of slowing ourselves down is that we may fix our minds on God and his perspective again: 'You will keep in perfect peace him (her) whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you (Isaiah 26:3).' This involves the renewing of our minds (Romans 12:2) and 'taking every thought captive' (2Corinthians 10:5). This does not happen instantaneously or without effort; it requires some discipline on our part and of course help from God. If God tells us not to worry then he will surely help us in this process.