I. THROW OFF THE WEIGHT

A. Hebrews 12: 1

1. In Hebrews 12, the author is challenging believers not to give up.

2. At the beginning verse 1: “Therefore since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses…."

3. The immediate literal context for the verse is Hebrews chapter 11 which has sometimes been called "The Faith Hall of Fame".

4. Hebrews 11 highlights people who at one time or another showed faithfulness to God by trusting Him and doing something that went against the norms of the culture of that day.

5. We are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses. The faith and faithfulness of our heroes gives us the confidence to keep believing and the courage to keep going.

6. When we grow weary, we remember those who have gone before us. The witness from that cloud speak to us and fill us with inspiration.

7. Here's the next thing the writer of Hebrews says to those who are growing weary and losing heart: "Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles". (Heb. 12:1b)

8. The phrase translated as "throw off" could be translated "to lay something down and push it beyond reach".

9. He tells them to identify what is weighing on them, set it down, and kick it away.

10. This isn’t a mild suggestion. It's a direct charge to use your strength, whether physical, emotional or volitional, depending on the situation, and throw the item away.

11. The challenge is to identify those things in your life that are weighing you down and take action (throwing it off) so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.
12. Greek runners trained with weights, then cast them aside when they were ready to run their race. The weights built strength, but when they were cast away, the athlete felt lighter, freer, stronger, and ready to excel.

13. Dedicated runners throw off everything that slows them down. The New Living Translation puts Hebrew 12:1 this way: "Let us strip off every weight that slows us down".

14. These weights aren't the same for everyone, but there is some dead weight that most of us struggle with.

II. UNHINDERED BY ANXIETY

A. The author begins chapter 4 by describing symptoms of anxiety such as fear, nervousness or feeling overwhelmed. He also uses the synonym “phobia. He then lists some signs (physical effects) on the body related to anxiety (breathing difficulties, digestive issues, abdominal pain, headaches, etc.)

1. There are countless side effects to anxiety, but they add up to one significant outcome: giving up. The weight of anxiety can become so heavy that it feels impossible to keep going.

2. To one degree or another, anxiety is a weight that we all carry. For some this weight is crushing, and for others it's merely annoying.

3. Under stress, what will your response be? FIGHT, FLIGHT or FREEZE

4. Idleman says that wherever you are on the anxiety spectrum, he believes God wants to take away the weight you have been carrying.

B. As the new Christian community grew, followers of Christ felt stressed out and overwhelmed. Peter wrote to encourage them as they faced the prospects of arrest and execution under the emperor Nero.

1. Peter begins his letter by addressing his readers as: "God's elect, exiles scattered throughout". (I Peter 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.

2. Here’s what Peter says to them: "Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you". (I Peter 5; 7)

3. Whether you see this verse as lame or powerful depends on what you believe about God.

4. In the fourth chapter of Mark, 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 upon them, and waves start splashing
into the boat. Panicked, Peter and the disciples start shaking Jesus - Wake up! Wake up! Here's the question they have for Him: "Don't You care if we drown"? (Mark 4: 38)

5. The disciples are doing what we often do - measuring God's concern for us by how hard it's raining in our lives.

III. TRANSFER THE WEIGHT

A. As it happens, the word "cast" isn't a fishing term. It's translated as “transfer" or, even more literally, "transfer the weight".

1. Peter doesn't simply say to release it; he says to transfer it. Let God carry the weight that has been holding you back and keeping you down.

IV. DIFFERENT WEIGHTS

A. What are you holding on to that you need to transfer over to God?

1. Some people have anxiety about the unknown.
   a. What if there's another terrorist attack? What if I get COVID-19? What if the economy collapses?
   b. Our head is spinning with possibilities. We wish Jesus would show up and tell us what to do. Instead, He 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)

2. Some people have anxiety about the unlikely.
   a. What if a meteor strikes Earth? What if there's an earthquake during hurricane season in Houston?

3. Some people have anxiety about the uncontrollable.
   a. Dr. Edward Hollowell gives this equation for anxiety: "A heightened sense of vulnerability and a diminished sense of power".
   b. Maybe you feel anxious about finances.

4. God wants you to travel light and get there faster.

V. DIFFERENT WAYS OF CASTING

A. Take a minute and ask yourself this question: How do I deal with the anxiety I feel??

1. Chemistry is chasing Christianity as the nation's largest religion. Millions of Americans now go to physicians and psychiatrists, who hold the keys to the kingdom of pharmaceutical relief, or to drug dealers and liquor stores.

2. Peter doesn't mention pills or priests. He says to cast our anxiety on God. Context helps. We need to add in the verse just preceding I Peter 5: 7 to get a clue here. "Humble yourselves,
therefore, under God's mighty hand, that He may lift you up in due time".

3. The New International Version translates the two verses into two separate sentences. "Humble yourselves. Casting your anxiety on Him". We humble ourselves by casting our anxieties on Him. But also when we cast our anxieties on Him, we humble ourselves.

VI. PRIDE MAKES ME SELF-CENTERED

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

B. There's quite a bit of research coming out about how the use of social media coincides with an epidemic rise in anxiety. Why? It causes us to obsess about our lives, our image and how others perceive us.

VII. PRIDE REFUSES TO ASK FOR HELP

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

1. 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 anxiety transference.

VIII. PRIDE HAS CONTROL ISSUES

A. Humility acknowledges that our control is limited.

1. Pride tries to take control; humility trusts that God cares and is capable and transfers the weight over to Him.

2. Pride makes me defensive when I fee! unfairly criticized.

3. Pride makes me selfish when I don't get my way.

4. Pride makes me stubborn when someone won't agree with me.

5. Pride makes me jealous when someone else has success or passes me up.

6. Pride makes me critical if someone else doesn't realize what they are doing is wrong or what they need to do differently.

7. When we worship, we humble ourselves. Worship is a powerful antidote to anxiety because worship and worry aren't compatible with each other. They can't coexist.

8. 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)

9. Prayer that casts the weight of anxiety on God is prayer that is full of thanksgiving and supplication.

IX. TELLING OUR ANXIETIES

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

2. Anxiety has a way of blinding us to God's blessings, but thanksgiving opens our eyes.

3. When our prayers are filled with supplication (meaning that we make our requests known to God), we are telling our anxieties that God is on our side and can carry the weight.

4. David models this for us in (many of) his psalms. You'll notice how often there is a shift in his prayers. He might begin by talking about the reason he has to be anxious. His enemies are chasing him or his life is in danger or the guilt of his sin is too heavy. Then there's a shift. (Psalm 73:1-2,7; Psalm 56: 1-4; Psalm 37:1-4)

5. For many casting their anxieties on God is a daily process.

6. The weight that you carry isn't part of who God made you and formed you to be in the beginning. He desires to take your weight from you. He desires you (to be) unhindered. He desires you free.

7. 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"?