Perhaps the biggest problem we western privileged people face is our own internal angst. Our anxiety, feeling vaguely or radically ill at ease. Some of us even have what I call the Enormous Agony. This is the kind of dis-ease that demands treatment. It is the source of temptation and the seed for sin. It starts small and always grows.

What kinds of treatments are we using? The more radical ones are drug and alcohol, causing a huge amount of obvious additional pain and agony. Their cost is clear and high to individuals, families, communities – liver failure, rough sleeping, knife crime, child and spousal abuse, heavy burden on policing and health care, car crashes, robberies, costly mistakes at work, and bankruptcy on every level.

We recently had two rough sleepers at our building who were angry and aggressive, drinking and probably using drugs, prowling around at night, shouting obscenities and threatening to kill each other. They disrupted the lives of possibly 50-60 people in the building and neighborhood, including teens on their way to classes. The police, property managers, cleaners, judges, and security personnel all spent significant time and energy on ‘moving them along’ or in other words ‘getting them away from us’. This was without even addressing a single one of their superficial or core problems, which most likely started with just a taste of alcohol when they were school age coupled with a propensity for physical addiction and the enormous agony or minor angst we all suffer from. They ended up not even approachable by those who could help them; they just played dead in their tent when a specialist charity visited several mornings in a row. They take the moments ease from a needle & hope they won’t wake up to their nightmare. The only known remedy is people who have been where they are to come and show them recovery.

But we in this room are probably not going to go to the low depths these two have found to at first treat then avoid their compounding problems with angst. We are going to have wine with dinner, prescriptions from the doctor, watch tv, be overly engaged with sport, engage in every health kick, obsess about our children and/or grandchildren, become workaholics, over-do hobbies, take classes, play video games, engage in social media, rant about political issues, even over-do church and other workshops. Not to say engaging in any of these activities is bad in itself, it just isn’t going to ever solve that emptiness, that meaninglessness, that worry, that “thing” that is slightly or hugely missing.

Our ‘pastimes’ will not center us in times of crises or anxiety or anger or boredom with the challenges of life. They won’t give us the peace that passes all understanding no matter what is happening around us. **They aren’t ever going to grow our trust in Jesus or our relationship with the Lord or open up space for us to experience and serve the Holy Spirit like Daniel and Jeremiah did.** And neither will ‘emergency room’ holiness. Thinking that we only need to rely on or listen to God ‘if’…x,y, or z ever happens to us.

So what can we do? The only answer to engage in action that requires sacrifice to builds trust. Action that demonstrates our knowledge that God loves us in an enormous way- in a way that is more enormous than the enormous agony. This is what sets Christians apart from just plain old ‘good people’ who have some kind of ‘method’ that is going to fix things in their life or in the world and keep them on ‘the right side.’

Just hearing about, and intellectually understanding, God’s love and God’s miracles and God’s prophets is not the antidote for the angst. It will not help us grow in trust or bring about internal serenity. Only taking radical actions like those taken by Daniel and Jeremiah can do that.

What do I mean by radical action? It means leaving your comfort zone. Committing your resources. Taking risks that you will miss out. Giving up something you want to keep. Doing something without assurance it will get you something. Let me give you some examples:

1. Gabriel Stauring went to Darfur
2. Men’s Monday Night Bible Study missed out on Monday Night Football
3. John Goldingay and I are reading Rabbis from the 13thc on Leviticus- the offering of sacrifice with the specific sin in mind

What might this look like for us in our lives? We are going to do an exercise that’s designed to give us some clues. And each of us will hopefully leave here with an action on our hearts that we can take or an ability to recognize an opportunity when it comes to us. A first step towards taking action to grow our trust in God.

What kind of action am I talking about? The clues are in what bugs us. It bugged Gabriel he didn’t have an answer for his daughter. It horrified the men to miss Monday Night Football. John and I assumed we would be bored and wasting valuable prayer and study time. I was freaked out about the rough sleepers, thinking why they were where they were, and this evolved into this talk and exercise we are about to do.

Ask who or what really gets under your skin. This is where we are going to find the emotional impetus to go forward. Ask what you can do that has no guaranteed result. What do I mean by guarantee? I mean we put money in a machine because we are guaranteed to get a candy, or forcibly overtaking a territory to secure a trade route like Nebuchadnezzar. That’s a guarantee. In this case we are going to do something and leave the results up to God. We are going to take an action where there is no guaranteed result. And we are going to take an action that costs us something.

Is it scary? Yes. If it’s a genuine Daniel/Jeremiah activity, it’s going to be scary. That is, it will be scary until you have some practice with this way of life. With living in God’s trust because Christ came here to teach us taking scary action is part of being a servant.

We are going to take a short time for everyone to answer the questions on the handout. Then gather in small groups of 5-8 and share the results as you feel comfortable.

**HANDOUT**

1. Think about some action in the past that you took, something scary, that turned out great or better or even just different than you expected. Write some notes here for sharing with your small group.
2. Think about a person or issue you are particularly upset about. Something that really annoys you or that you can’t get out of your mind. Or something someone has asked you to do or contribute to that you don’t want to do but you can’t let it go or can’t stop thinking about it.
3. Why can’t you let it go or just do it? What is causing your dilemma? What have they done or what is wrong with the situation? What is the value or ethic of yours that it violates?
4. What action can you take that will leave the resolution of your dilemma up to God? What action asks you to be the most brave? Ask for ideas from your group if you are stuck.