

## Coping with Anxiety

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Anxiety goes by many different names, stress, worry and fear are three. God's Word speaks specifically about anxiety. Jesus said, "So, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries on its own. Today's trouble is enough for today." (Matthew 6: 34 NRSV) Why? If you read Matthew 6:25-33 you will discover, God's got this.

Anxiety, especially unresolved anxiety has a profound effect upon us physically. A number of years ago while I was engaged in my annual physical, my blood pressure was elevated. My doctor stated, "You've got to do something about your stress and anxiety. You know Dave, stress and anxiety will kill you." I thought, but didn't say, "Well thanks Doc, that really helped my stress and anxiety level!" Needless to say, my doctor's words did not reduce my anxiety. His words did tell me I needed to do something to alleviate stress and anxiety.

It is important to understand for you who are in the throes of anxiety, and those close to someone experiencing anxiety, logic does not alleviate anxiety. It is true that emotions are controlled by what we think, but it is equally true that emotions trump logic when fear is overpowering us.

The physical effects of anxiety may be undetectable without a medical exam. Some of the symptoms of anxiety and stress are more apparent and act as warning signs. These signs are like the yellow flashing light that tell us danger is ahead and we need to slow down.

Our survival response is to run, fight or take flight in a time of crisis or perceived crisis. These responses are exhibited in many emotional, physical, and spiritual ways. Some of those signs are muscle tension, headaches, backaches, a clenched jaw or fist, feelings of restlessness, difficulty in concentration, feeling lethargic, sleeping longer, or an ability to fall sleep are all signs of elevated anxiety. There are signs that others usually pick up upon more readily than you or I may when experiencing anxiety. Elevated anger, talking more, talking less, talk filled with more despair, staring into space, an apathetic countenance, and loss of interest in things that were enjoyed.

Historically, those who follow Jesus use spiritual disciplines, although not specifically practiced to defeat anxiety, do bring relief when anxiety and stress are encountered. It goes without saying that prayer is vitally important in relieving anxiety.

Philippians 4:6-7 reads,

"Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (NRSV)

The admonition is to not worry about anything, but we are not left there. We are informed the relief to anxiety is through supplication and thanksgiving. Focusing on petitioning God, supplication, and remembering what God has done for us, thanksgiving, is a necessity to overcoming anxiety. It is important to catch this, God's peace, which surpasses all understanding, will guard our hearts and minds. We serve an amazing God, who in the midst of uncertainty can fill us with supernatural peace. The key is reliance on God and a heart of gratuity. When anxious, start with thanking God for all he has done for you, especially past events that God brought you through.

Philippians 4:7-9

<sup>7</sup>And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.<sup>8</sup>Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. <sup>9</sup>Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you. (NRSV)

For some of us, praying is enough. For some, it is not that simple, especially if we have had traumatic events in our past. For others it may be due to the present pandemic that when our lives were more normal fear was not an issue, but now it is an unwanted guest with whom we live.

Philippians 4:8 speaks of what we think about is vitally important. The implication is we cannot not think. Our minds are at work at a conscious as well as subconscious level. In the midst of increased anxiety, when we find our minds racing, thinking negative thoughts, our anxiety level increases. You have prayed, but the fear does not subside, instead it may increase. What can you do next? How can you find the peace you desperately need in those moments?

We cannot receive from God what God has for us when we cling to worry. The purpose of the following is to take our focus off what we are worrying about, allow God to settle us down so that we can reflect on the admonition of Philippians 4: 6-9.

Anxiety Reducing Practices

Music:

Music penetrates our soul. I can't play an instrument, but I can whistle. People know my mood by what I am whistling. Happy songs and I'm doing fine. Sad songs, or songs of rescue, I'm worried or upset. Music transcends our conscious mind and goes right to our soul.

Here is the means to use music to relax and find peace.

1. Find your favorite worship songs and play them.
2. Play the song and let the entire song wash over you. Pay particular attention to the instrumentation. You don't have to be a trained musician to hear the drums, or the keyboard. The intent is to relax and have your mind refocused and renewed.
3. Pay attention to the words as you listen paying close attention to what they say and what the Holy Spirit is saying to you. Understand that the words and what you are hearing may not have anything to do with anxiety, but what you are doing is renewing your mind by focusing on God.

I am not into classical music, but I find listening to soothing classical music settles me. While I work, playing it settles me. While I read a book, the music is still reaching my subconscious and it settles me. You can find this type of music by searching "relaxing Christian music" on your web browser. Look for instrumentals.

Breathing exercise:

Pastor Tony in the first message of the series "Breathe," talked about breathing in and out by repeating Yahweh. Breathe in slowly, Yah, breathe slowly out weh. Hold after you breathe out for 3 – 5 seconds to feel the tension leave you. In Yah, out waah. Focus on your breathing, listen to your breath, feel the fall and rise of your chest.

Then, as you continue to breathe, Yah ..... weh, pray, God, or Jesus, or Holy Spirit I desire to experience you with me. While you wait, continue to breathe in and out. (Some of us relate best to God the Father, some to Jesus, or you may relate best to the Holy Spirit, whomever of the Godhead you relate to best.) Repeat – Breathe in, Yah, breathe out weh. Hold. Continue to pray. Do this for at least 10 times or until you feel the anxiety leave.

Centering

This is a technique I used with many counseling clients who were experiencing anxiety. I use it when I cannot fall asleep. Again, we cannot not think.

1. Place yourself in a comfortable position. If it is light enough, look around the room and ask, "What do I see?"
2. Close your eyes and listening asking yourself what do I hear? Birds chirping, the furnace fan, cars and trucks in the background are all noises we are not aware unless we listen. Take your time to do this.
3. Next focus on your physical body and ask, "What do I feel? Starting with your feet and working your way up your body. My feet are crossed right now. My left foot is touching the floor. Where it is touching the floor is warmer than my toes. My right foot is on my

left foot. Where it touches I can feel the pressure and both feet are warmer where they touch. I feel my big toe of my left foot touching the bottom of my right foot.

Next move up your legs. I can feel my pants on my lower legs. The bottom top of both thighs is touching the chair. Both have equal pressure and they are warmer than the top of my thighs.

Continue this all the way up to the top of your head.

Visualization – empowering our imagination. (This can be used alone or with one of the three above.)

Ephesians 1:15-23

<sup>15</sup>For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you and your love for all the saints, <sup>16</sup>do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers; <sup>17</sup>that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. <sup>18</sup>I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, <sup>19</sup>and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might <sup>20</sup>which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, <sup>21</sup>far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. <sup>22</sup>And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, <sup>23</sup>which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

One gift God has given us is our imagination. In our western culture mindset, we underutilize its benefit when relating to God. The Psalms are replete with crying out to God and asking, “God, are you with me, with us?” The answer is yes.

Paul in the passage above talks of the eyes of our heart being enlightened. Paul goes on to say, “so that you will know.” This word has an experiential meaning that goes beyond gathering knowledge. What Paul is praying is that you and I will experience, literally see, the hope of God’s calling and the riches of his inheritance, and experience God’s power, the same power that raised Jesus from the dead.

This is where our imagination comes in, as we are looking into the spiritual world to see or receive a word so that we can experience God the Father, or Jesus, or the Holy Spirit is with you. You may think I don’t know how to connect to God. Don’t worry, God knows how to reveal himself to you.

Having counseled countless people who never experienced the presence of God in their lives, God always showed up in a way they could experience him as Jeremiah 29: 12-13 states “Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and

find me when you see me with all your heart.” Jesus put it this way, Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest (peace). Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

1. After using one or more of the three above (Music, Breathe or Centering), pray the following from Ephesians 1: 18-19:  
Jesus (or God the Father or Holy Spirit) my desire is to experience your presence. You know how I can experience you. I ask you to reveal yourself to me. I need to feel you, hear you, or see you. As Paul prayed for all of us who believe, I too pray that the eyes of my heart will be enlightened, so that I will experience the hope of your calling, what are the riches of the glory of your inheritance in me, and what is the surpassing greatness of your power toward me as I believe in you. I believe these are in accordance with the working of the strength of your might which you brought about in Christ, when you raised Jesus from the dead and seated him at your right hand in the heavenly places. Amen!
2. Then wait with your eyes closed. In your “mind’s eye,” listen and look around. What do you see, if you do, what is Jesus doing? If you hear, what is the Holy Spirit saying to you? If it is only a feeling, What is it you feel?

Once your experience your anxiety dissipating, remembering what God has done for you. Give thanks and then focus on God’s truth. There are Scriptures that read and meditated upon of God’s faithfulness that will come back to you when you experience anxiety.

Hope: I Corinthians. 10:13, 2 Corinthians. 9:8, Ephesians 3:20, Limitations’ 3:32, Hebrews 6:19-20, Psalms 42, 146:3-10, I Thessalonians 1:3, I Peter 1:3

Peace: Matthew 11:28-30, John 14:27, Isaiah 26:3-4, Isaiah 53:5, Luke 7:48-50, Psalm 4:8, Psalm 23, Psalm 85:8, Philippians 4:6--9

Power of Prayer: Hebrews 4:14-16, I Peter 5:6-7, Psalm 34:15-18, Psalm 50:15, Psalm 105: 1-4, Psalm 66: 13-20, Proverbs 3:5-6

#### Final Word

Do not beat yourself up if anxiety returns, instead return to what you have used to combat fear and stress in the past. REMEMBER, God is with you and he will deliver you.