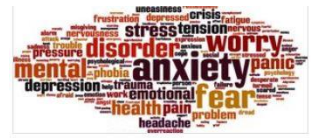


Anxiety is Something We All Face

Today was to be a busy day so I turned off the light at 10 PM last night and settled down for a good sleep. My mind had other plans. I had unfinished business and deadlines fast approaching. By 11:30 PM my mind awakened me and wouldn't let me rest. My heart was beating faster and all I could think of was the unfinished task. Sleep wasn't an option. My solution was to get up and do something to address the unfinished business. For me, my core anxiety is the fear of failure. If I address it with some progress I can overcome what would have prevented me from a good night's sleep. I have found that mild anxiety is a catalyst and motivator to get my act together, finish what is currently undone and not fail. When kept in check, my anxiety is a positive for me.



For many others anxiety is an unhealthy condition that often renders a person incapable of dealing with an issue at hand. It can cause a feeling of intense fear and distress, which becomes overwhelming and prevents them from doing everyday activities. The dictionary defines it as a “feeling of worry, nervousness, or unease, typically about an imminent event or something with an uncertain outcome.” A psychiatric definition in the same dictionary describes it as a “nervous disorder characterized by a state of excessive uneasiness and apprehension, typically with compulsive behavior or panic attacks.” Some of the symptoms are being “on edge, uncontrollable feelings of worry and the inability to concentrate”. While I tend to overwork to accomplish a goal the most common defense mechanism is to withdraw – from particular situations, or in more extreme cases, from just about everything.

I attended a recent seminar entitled “Angst: Raising Awareness Around Anxiety.” The seminar included a screening of a video that showed first-hand testimonials by high schoolers and adults about their anxieties and how they deal with them. Having listened to the movie and a local panel of mental health experts I concluded that many of the remedies suggested were consistent with scriptural passages I found after the seminar.

God did not create us to be anxious. God wants us to live in peace and promises to stand with us every step of the way. *So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand (Isiah 41:10).* God told us not to worry. *Then Jesus said to his disciples: “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothes ... Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life (Luke 12:22-23, 25).* God offers to shoulder our worries. *Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 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 (Matthew 11:28-29).*

Coping with stressful situations is controlling your mind so that it doesn't paralyze you. People with anxiety disorders tend to adapt one of the tendencies of a “fight or flight” syndrome.

Following the seminar I was particularly interested to see if God's Word coincided with the approach of mental health professions. I found biblical references for many. Some of the ways people can cope with anxiety include:

- A key approach is to **distract yourself by doing something else**, taking a break from and not letting the situation monopolize your mind. Give your mind a rest. It needs it. Otherwise, we torture ourselves by running over the same things in our mind. It can become a vicious, continuous loop playing in your head.
 - Play soothing music, draw or write something or read a book.
- **Relax** and take your mind off what is bothering you. Relaxation during a time of stress happens only if you choreograph it.
 - **Breathe.** Take slow, deep breaths, holding them for a few seconds before exhaling. *The LORD replied, “My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.” (Exodus 33:14)*
 - **Focus on the quietness in the room**, tuning your mind to the pattern of the sound of a ticking clock or some other rhythmic sound. *This is what the Sovereign LORD, the Holy One of Israel, says: “In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength (Isiah 30:15)*
- **Talk to someone and describe what you are feeling.** This may be difficult to do since our tendency is to keep things to ourselves. *Anxiety weighs down the heart, but a kind word cheers it up (Proverbs 12:25).*
 - **You don't have to go through life issues alone.** *Moses' father-in-law replied, “What you are doing is not good. You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone (Exodus 18:17-18).*

- With the encouragement of others **do what you are afraid of doing**. *Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.* (Joshua 1:9).
- Don't avoid the situation but face it head-on, **with the help of others**. The way to overcome your fear is to overcome the issue. *Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything* (James 1:2-4).
- **Establish a rating system to help you understand the severity of your fears**. This was a new concept for me. By quantifying (say on a scale of 1 to 100) helps a person identify their level of fear when trying to overcome a stressful situation and is particularly helpful when a person has overcome a situation they thought rated very high on the stress meter. It provides a measure of accomplishment. *Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me* (Psalm 23:4).
- **The best thing that anyone can do to help you is to listen**. To really listen. *Listen to advice and accept discipline, and at the end you will be counted among the wise* (Proverbs 19:20).

God gave us the tools inside our brain to overcome situations that cause us stress. We can change.

- For some, relying on our faith is enough. *Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight* (Proverbs 3:5-6).
- Life without faith can be cruel, but with God's help we can rise above what we face. *Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid* (John 14:27)
- Many people need the assistance of a trained counselor to unlock those tools. They can help us find the relief that we need, especially if we need more than just a caring friend.

The power of positive thinking isn't the only solution, and may be in reality, avoiding the issue. We need to face the issue head on. In Jim Collin's book, Good to Great, he talked about the Stockdale Paradox, which suggests balancing realism with optimism. Prisoner of War James Stockdale was asked what prisoners didn't make it out of the prison camps. *"Who didn't make it out?" "Oh, that's easy," he said. "The optimists." "The optimists? I don't understand," ... "The optimists. Oh, they were the ones who said, 'We're going to be out by Christmas.' And Christmas would come, and Christmas would go. Then they'd say, 'We're going to be out by Easter.' And Easter would come, and Easter would go. And then Thanksgiving, and then it would be Christmas again. And they died of a broken heart."* It is a reality that we can't just wish away. Some situations are beyond our control but what we can do is to control how we deal with them. Get the help that you need and face the issue at hand.

We can be changed. Oswald Chambers said, "To say that prayer changes things is not as close to the truth as saying prayer changes me, and then I change things." The change we need to make is in our mind, with God's help. In his letter to the Romans Paul wrote, *The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace* (Romans 8:6). We may not understand how it works but with God all things are possible. *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* (Philippians 4:6-7).

Don't let anxiety rob you of being the person God created you to be. New York Times best-selling author Mandy Hale said, "Happiness is letting go of what you think your life is supposed to look like and celebrating it for everything that it is." In spite of whatever you are dealing with, remember you are special and loved. "We are not loved because we have value, we have value because we are loved." (Dick Horn, Kernersville CareNet counselor.) Let's celebrate the person God made us to be.

Question: What is your core fear? What kind of situation causes you to lose sight of reality and to act irrationally?

Closing Prayer: Dear Lord. Help us unlock the tools you have given us to deal with stress in our lives. Place around us people to help us talk through and ultimately face the situations that would otherwise paralyze us. Amen.

References for the development of this devotion: CareNet Seminar: "Angst – Raising Awareness Around Anxiety" (4/29/19). Info about a 55-minute movie shown at the seminar, Angst, can be found at <https://angstmovie.com>. The Distracted Dance of Resiliency, by Katina Boyd and quotes are from Good to Great, by Jim Collins and My Utmost for His Highest, by Oswald Chambers.