

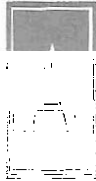


UNDERSTANDING ANXIETY

ARCHIBALD D. HART

(Philippians 4)

Anxiety



Anxiety disorders are the most common emotional struggles of today, affecting some 20 to 30 million people. Why such a dramatic rise in the incidence of anxiety disorders? In a nutshell, many people live too disconnected, carry too much debt, and live at too fast a pace. People were designed to travel at a camel's pace, but they behave like supersonic jets, running constantly on a supercharged stream of adrenaline. They end up paying for this abuse with worry and anxiety.

FEAR, WORRY, AND ANXIETY

Fear

Fear is a natural and necessary alarm system that is triggered whenever we feel threatened. This God-given emotion ignites a response to a real or perceived danger, such as running into a spider web. The fear response imagines the spider biting, so the body is put on alert. The experience of the fear is very real. God has created us to feel fear, and, provided the fear is justified, it is perfectly normal and can lead to protective behavior.

People also feel fear over imagined possible outcomes. Though the list is potentially endless, some common fears include: losing a child, spouse, job, or health, being shamed or humiliated in public, being rejected, failing (or succeeding), dying or dying painfully. Others face phobic fears—of heights, tight places, the dark, etc.

Worry

Worry is not an emotion but a mental activity that produces anxiety. This *stinking thinking* is an unhealthy and unreasonable exercise that attempts to solve situations beyond our control. Instead of praying or simply letting go of things that cannot be controlled, worriers obsess about controlling the problem, talking to themselves about how terrible it is, and imagining all sorts of horrible results if the problem is

not solved immediately. Over enough time, people even begin to believe that if they worry hard enough, their worry will somehow solve the problem.

Anxiety

Anxiety keeps a person from relaxing, from resting. It is a pervasive, long-term inner feeling of nervousness, unrest, and uneasiness. Anxiety's symptoms can include: tense feelings, rapid heart beat, dry mouth, increased blood pressure, jumpiness or feeling faint, excessive perspiring, feeling clammy, and anticipation of trouble.

Anxiety Disorders

Everyone experiences some anxiety. But frequent and intense anxiety may indicate a clinically diagnosable and treatable disorder. An anxiety disorder can be a sudden and unexplained uneasiness that lasts a few hours, or it can be a constant state. Simply wishing the symptoms away will not work. Some forms of troubling anxiety include:

Generalized Anxiety. A pervasive form of chronic tension that manifests itself in many different situations. When it exists longer than six months, it is diagnosable as an anxiety disorder.

Phobia. Fear strongly associated with a single object, place, or event.

Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder. OCD is fear hidden behind a variety of obsessions

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and compulsions, such as highly ritualized/repetitive behavior (like constant hand-washing). These maladaptive patterns are attempts to manage anxious thoughts and feelings.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. As a result of being victimized or even witnessing a traumatic event, recurring visions, dreams, and memories of the trauma induce fear and are relived in debilitating ways. First recognized in prisoners of war, PTSD is now seen as a common experience across a whole range of traumatic life experiences—physical and sexual abuse, natural disasters, injurious accidents, etc.

Panic Attack. The sudden onset of panic is an overwhelming state of anxiety—being flooded and paralyzed by the fight-or-flight response. Symptoms include racing heart, sweating, dizziness, ringing ears, choking, and vertigo. The physiological reaction to panic is so strong that the panic sufferer often imagines that he or she is having a heart attack or going crazy. Agoraphobia can set in—the fear of returning to the people and places where panic occurred. At its worst, the sufferer ends up house-bound, fearful of panic away from home, and excessively vigilant. More than three panic attacks in a month or the onset of agoraphobia indicate a disorder that needs professional treatment.

SCRIPTURE AND ANXIETY

Many Christians think that God condemns all anxiety, and, by implication, that He also condemns those who suffer with different forms of it. Certainly Scripture condemns a particular form of anxiety. Jesus said, “Let not your heart be troubled” (John 14:1), referring to a form of anxiety that has been with us for all time: *worry*.

Jesus’ familiar expression, “Take no thought for your life,” refers to anxious worry. In the Sermon on the Mount, He calls attention to the destructiveness of

anxiety about the future (Matt. 6:25–34). His teaching is startlingly clear—such worry is futile, pointless, and unable to help solve the problem. No worrisome thought about tomorrow can help people live better or keep evil away. Worry, then, is not an emotion but a pattern of thinking that takes hold when people try to live independent of God.

Unless fear, worry, and anxiety are honestly faced and worked through, people can end up in a pattern of avoidance—organizing their lives around people and situations that they must avoid. It is much healthier to practice another pattern:

- > Turn to God first (1 Pet. 5:7).
- > Focus on the solution, not the problem (Matt. 14:22, 23).
- > Stop wasting energy on worrying (Matt. 6:25–34).
- > Keep your thoughts on God in order to have peace (Is. 26:3).
- > Pray (Phil. 4:4–9).
- > Direct your attention toward your true source of hope (Ps. 91:2).

FURTHER MEDITATION:

Other passages to study about the issue of anxiety include:

- > Deuteronomy 31:8
- > Psalms 23; 103; 121; 146
- > Isaiah 41:13; 44:2
- > 2 Timothy 1:7
- > Hebrews 13:5
- > 1 Peter 5:7–11

To Learn More: Turn to the key passage note on anxiety at Philipians 4:6–13 on page 1567. See also the personality profile of David on page 713.

PHILIPPIAN GENEROSITY

¹⁰But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last your care for me has flourished again; though you surely did care, but you lacked opportunity. ¹¹Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: ¹²I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need can do all things through Christ^a who strengthens me.

¹⁴Nevertheless you have done well that you shared in my distress. ¹⁵Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only. ¹⁶For even in Thessalonica you sent *aid* once and again for my necessities. ¹⁷Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the

fruit that abounds to your account. ¹⁸Indeed I have all and abound. I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things *sent* from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God. ¹⁹And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus. ²⁰Now to our God and Father *be* glory forever and ever. Amen.

GREETING AND BLESSING

²¹Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brethren who are with me greet you. ²²All the saints greet you, but especially those who are of Caesar's household.

²³The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.^a Amen.

4:13 ^aNU-Text reads *Him who*. 4:23 ^aNU-Text reads *your spirit*.

KEY PASSAGE



Anxiety

ANXIOUS FOR NOTHING

(4:6-13)

Paul certainly had plenty of reason to feel anxious. Sitting in a Roman prison, he didn't know if he would be released or put to death. Writing to the believers in Philippi, however, he urged them, "Be anxious for nothing."

Anxiety and its companion, worry, do their best to immobilize believers. People are anxious about the future; they are anxious about events that haven't happened but *could* happen. Anxiety causes physical problems. Anxiety makes people fearful and distressed.

So what can believers do about their anxiety? Paul gives the answer, "In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God." When we give our anxiety to God, He replaces it with His peace that "surpasses all understanding." God's peace is beyond comprehension because it makes no sense—the circumstances seem to require anxiety, but instead we feel God's peace. When we feel anxiety rising, we should turn to God in prayer. He will give us the peace He promised.

To Learn More: Turn to the article about anxiety on pages 1568, 1569. See also the personality profile of David on page 713.

Who ate my bread,
Has lifted up *his* heel against me.

BOOK TWO: PSALMS 42-72

PSALM 42

But You, O LORD, be merciful to me, and
raise me up,
That I may repay them.
By this I know that You are well pleased
with me,
Because my enemy does not triumph
over me.
As for me, You uphold me in my
integrity,
And set me before Your face forever.

YEARNING FOR GOD IN THE MIDST OF
DISTRESSES

*To the Chief Musician. A Contemplation^a
of the sons of Korah.*

As the deer pants for the water brooks,
So pants my soul for You, O God.
² My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.
When shall I come and appear before
God?^a

Blessed be the LORD God of Israel
From everlasting to everlasting!
Amen and Amen.

42:1title ^aHebrew *Maschil* **42:2** ^aFollowing
Masoretic Text and Vulgate; some Hebrew
manuscripts, Septuagint, Syriac, and Targum read *I*
see the face of God.

PERSONALITY PROFILE



Anxiety

DAVID: THE ANXIETIES OF A KING

(PSALM 42)

"Tears." "Cast down." "Disquieted." David, the great king of Israel, conquering hero, and slayer of Goliath, uttered these unsettling words. Evidently this man, who as a boy equipped with just a sling and his faith had conquered a giant, also faced times of anxiety and fear. Possibly the years of running from Saul's murderous jealousy traumatized David and set him up for a lifelong struggle with anxiety. He seems obsessive in his focus on his enemies. Throughout the psalms, he laments people's wickedness and violence and entreats God to deliver him and his nation from such evil. He wrote of feeling alone and forgotten by God: "I will say to God my Rock, 'Why have You forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?' " (Ps. 42:9). Anxiety responds, "No one can help me—not even God." There is no peace when the mind is filled with such toxic thinking.

One of David's great contributions is the record in the Psalms of his response to his fears and anxieties. Instead of turning away from God, he grabbed more tightly onto Him. Psalm 94:19 states, "In the multitude of my anxieties within me, Your comforts delight my soul." And Psalm 34:4 exclaims: "I sought the LORD, and He heard me, and delivered me from all my fears."

David described his fears—he didn't dismiss or deny them—and then he turned them over to God. He replaced those thoughts by recalling God's goodness, power, and faithful intervention in his life. This moved him to break out in praise and thankfulness, celebrating life and worshiping the God who had never forsaken him. Because of this faithful practice over many years, David was able to proclaim his victory over anxiety:

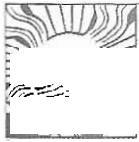
- > "The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" (Ps. 27:1)
- > "Hope in God; for I shall yet praise Him, the help of my countenance and my God" (Ps. 42:11).

To Learn More: Turn to the article about anxiety on pages 1568, 1569. See also the key passage note at Philippians 4:6-13 on page 1567.

- 4 Trust in the LORD forever,
For in YAH, the LORD, is everlasting
strength.^a
For He brings down those who dwell on
high,
The lofty city;
He lays it low,
He lays it low to the ground,
He brings it down to the dust.
The foot shall tread it down—
The feet of the poor
And the steps of the needy.”
- 7 The way of the just is uprightness;
O Most Upright,
You weigh the path of the just.
- 8 Yes, in the way of Your judgments,
O LORD, we have waited for You;
The desire of our soul is for Your
name
And for the remembrance of You.
With my soul I have desired You in the
night,
Yes, by my spirit within me I will seek
You early;
For when Your judgments are in the
earth,
The inhabitants of the world will learn
righteousness.
- 10 Let grace be shown to the wicked,
Yet he will not learn righteousness;
In the land of uprightness he will deal
unjustly,
And will not behold the majesty of the
LORD.
- 11 LORD, when Your hand is lifted up, they
will not see.
But they will see and be ashamed
For their envy of people;
Yes, the fire of Your enemies shall
devour them.
- 12 LORD, You will establish peace for us,
For You have also done all our works in
us.
- 13 O LORD our God, masters besides You
Have had dominion over us;
But by You only we make mention of
Your name.
- 14 They are dead, they will not live;
They are deceased, they will not rise.
Therefore You have punished and
destroyed them,
And made all their memory to perish.
- 15 You have increased the nation, O LORD,
You have increased the nation;

26:4 ^aOr Rock of Ages

SOUL NOTE



Perfect Peace (26:3) Occasions for anxiety happen. Jesus reminded His followers that “in the world you will have tribulation” (John 16:33). The prophet Isaiah wrote that God gives peace in spite of conflict and turmoil. Peace is so basic to God’s nature that it is part of His name. God the Father is the “God of peace” (Phil. 4:9; Heb. 13:20). God the Son is the Prince of Peace (Is. 9:6). And God the Holy Spirit produces peace in our lives (Gal. 5:22). To have “perfect peace,” wrote Isaiah, we must focus our minds on God and trust in Him. **Topic: Anxiety**

SOUL NOTE



Secure in Him (26:4, 5) The answer to human insecurities is to “trust in the LORD forever.” In Him we should find our security, peace, and confidence. We are surrounded by plenty of problems that fill our thoughts. Beset by fear and insecurity, we feel shaky, unstable, and unsafe. Jesus told His followers, on this eve of His death, “Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you. . . . Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John 14:27). With Christ’s peace in our hearts we can be secure, knowing that He is in control. **Topic: Insecurity**

"Most assuredly, I say to you, one of you will betray Me." ²²Then the disciples looked at one another, perplexed about whom He spoke.

²³Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved. ²⁴Simon Peter therefore motioned to him to ask who it was of whom He spoke.

²⁵Then, leaning back^a on Jesus' breast, he said to Him, "Lord, who is it?"

²⁶Jesus answered, "It is he to whom I shall give a piece of bread when I have dipped it." And having dipped the bread, He gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon. ²⁷Now after the piece of bread, Satan entered him. Then Jesus said to him, "What you do, do quickly." ²⁸But no one at the table knew for what reason He said this to him. ²⁹For some thought, because Judas had the money box, that Jesus had said to him, "Buy those things we need for the feast," or that he should give something to the poor.

³⁰Having received the piece of bread, he then went out immediately. And it was night.

THE NEW COMMANDMENT

³¹So, when he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man is glorified, and God is glorified in Him. ³²If God is glorified in Him, God will also glorify Him in Himself, and glorify Him immediately. ³³Little children, I

shall be with you a little while longer. You will seek Me; and as I said to the Jews, 'Where I am going, you cannot come,' so now I say to you. ³⁴A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. ³⁵By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."



A Resting Place (14:1-4) The disciples were bewildered and discouraged. Jesus had said He was going away, that He would die, that one of the disciples was a traitor, and that Peter would deny Him. If so, it seemed that their great hopes had been in vain. "Let not your heart be troubled," Jesus told them. Believers can rest their troubled hearts, knowing that Jesus is in control regardless of the circumstances. He relieves our anxiety about the future when we trust Him. **Topic: Anxiety**

JESUS PREDICTS PETER'S DENIAL

³⁶Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, where are You going?"

Jesus answered him, "Where I am going you cannot follow Me now, but you shall follow Me afterward."

³⁷Peter said to Him, "Lord, why can I not follow You now? I will lay down my life for Your sake."

³⁸Jesus answered him, "Will you lay down your life for My sake? Most assuredly, I say to you, the rooster shall not crow till you have denied Me three times."

THE WAY, THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE

14 "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me.

My Father's house are many mansions;^a if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.^b ³And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. ⁴And where I go you know, and the way you know."

⁵Thomas said to Him, "Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?"

⁶Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."

THE FATHER REVEALED

⁷"If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him."

^{13:25} ^aNU-Text and M-Text add *thus*.

^{14:2} ^aLiterally *dwellings*. ^bNU-Text adds a word which would cause the text to read either *if it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? or if it were not so I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you.*

SOUL NOTE