

Chapter 7



The Bitter Roots of Anxiety and Fear

**Bible Character – Jehoshaphat – 2 Chronicles 20
Symptoms – Effects – Causes – Biblical Cures**

Summary of Anxiety

Anxiety, worry, and fear afflict most people from time to time. It is when anxiety becomes a daily free-floating emotion that it becomes a serious problem. There are times when you should be afraid, like when a bear is chasing you in the woods. But when worry and anxiety are free-floating emotions, our adrenal glands kick into overdrive. That causes both physical and emotional damage.

Anxiety is the belief that the boogeyman is out to get you. There's a monster under your bed. Bad luck is out to get you every day of your life, or the devil is out to get you if you don't watch out, or there's a black cloud behind every silver lining.

Anxiety affects all of us from time to time. Worry is anxiety multiplied. Fear is worry on steroids. Everyone can feel anxious sometimes, but people with anxiety disorders often experience fear and worry that are intense and excessive. Their minds play tricks on them, conjuring up ghosts and ghouls of bad luck to come. Anxiety is the opposite of faith. Faith rests. Anxiety frets.

What Is Anxiety?

Anxiety as defined by the Encyclopedia of Psychology and the American Psychological Association:

“Anxiety is an emotion characterized by feelings of tension, worried thoughts, and physical changes like increased blood pressure. Anxiety is not the same as fear, but they are often used interchangeably. Anxiety is considered a future-oriented, long-acting response broadly focused on a diffuse threat, whereas fear is an appropriate, present-oriented, and short-lived response to a clearly identifiable and specific threat.”

Franklin Delano Roosevelt famously said in his 1933 first inaugural address, *“The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.”* He was referring to the fear of the Great Depression, reassuring the American people they had it within themselves to defeat the Great Depression if they did not succumb to their own fears. These were not imagined fears, they were real.

Facts about anxiety in today's society.

Anxiety disorders are the most common mental illness in the world, affecting 4% of the world's population. In 2023, a study found that 32.3% of adults reported symptoms of anxiety and the accompanying symptoms of depression. 6.8 million Americans are currently struggling with an anxiety disorder. That's 37% of all adults. Anxiety breeds depression. In the U.S. the National Institute of Mental Health reported that 19.1% of adults over 18 years of age had an anxiety disorder in the past year, with 23.4% being females, and 14.3% males. A Pew survey found that 70% of teens say anxiety and depression are a major problem among their peers.

The Situation (biblical character)

A Biblical Example of Anxiety – Jehoshaphat in 2 Chronicles 20

Israel was in a sad state of affairs. Things were bad and getting worse. Wicked King Ahab had been killed in battle. Jehoshaphat tore down the Asherah poles and altars to false gods throughout the land. He appointed judges and Levites to administer the laws of God. They were somewhat recovered through the leadership of Jehoshaphat and a measure of peace ensued. Suddenly, the kingdoms of the Edomites with vast armies surrounded Israel. Jehoshaphat and the people were terrified. They had no great army to fend off these invaders. So, Jehoshaphat called on the Lord, saying, *“For we have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you.”* (2 Chronicles 20:12)

The prophets spoke, encouraging the people that God was on their side affirming they should not be afraid, *“Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God’s. You will not have to fight this battle. Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the Lord will give. Have faith in the Lord and you will be upheld.”* (verses 15, 17, 20)

Then everyone fell down and worshiped the Lord and praised God with a loud voice. Jehoshaphat appointed priests to sing to the Lord and to praise Him for the splendor of His holiness as they went out before the army. As they sang and praised, the Lord sent ambushes against the enemies and they were defeated.

Here was a case of real anxiety, fear and worry. There really was an enemy with a vast army coming against them. Who wouldn’t be afraid? But their fear turned into faith, believing God was on their side. They sang praise to God instead of cowering in fear. The answer to anxiety, fear and worry was clear: *“Have faith in the Lord and you will be upheld!”*

How often fear grips us and we refuse to let go, thinking that somehow worrying, fretting, and imagining worst-case scenarios will somehow rescue us. Worry never changes anything. Fear only paralyzes. Anxiety prolongs nameless fears and imaginations of bad things to come. It is easy to say, “Don’t be afraid” as God has said over and over in the Scriptures. *“Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”* (Isaiah 41:10) It is another thing entirely to believe it and rest in it.

The Symptoms of Anxiety

Symptoms of Anxiety

- Trouble sleeping, insomnia
- Feeling irritable, restless, jittery
- Experiencing nausea or abdominal distress
- Chest pain and/or heart palpitations
- Sense of impending danger, panic, or doom
- Separation anxiety, afraid to be alone
- Agoraphobia, fear to leave safe environments
- Chest tightness or pain
- Chills or hot flashes
- Choking sensations
- Confusion
- Difficulty breathing
- Dizziness
- Dry mouth
- Increased blood pressure
- Nausea
- Racing heartbeat
- Shaking or trembling
- Sweating

Physical Symptoms of Anxiety

Fears, worries, anxiety and phobias lead to physical, emotional, and behavioral symptoms.

S.I. McMillen, MD, in his book, *None of These Diseases*, does a wonderful job relating the underlying cause of many diseases. Here are just a few to illustrate the physical evidence of anxiety.

Emotions can change the function of the body and anxiety is one of the greatest culprits because it lies underneath our conscious awareness. It is a hidden malady that triggers many physical manifestations. The thyroid and adrenal glands are important to us because they help us cope with danger.

A cat unexpectedly encounters a dog, the hairs on the back of the cat stand up on end. Its heart beats faster, the blood pressure rises and breathing is accelerated. Adrenaline is squirted into the blood stream because the emotional center of the brain sends a message to get ready to fight or take flight.

All this is normal, but in humans we have the ability to sustain fear as anxiety, anticipating some dread event that might not come at all. That acts as a spigot of

adrenaline and other glands to over produce, thus causing sickness of headaches, nervous gases in the stomach, ulcers, migraines, and even heart attacks.

Adrenal and thyroid glands are normally beneficial and necessary. If one awakes at night to the fact that a burglar is in the house, fear arouses the emotional center to send messages to these glands for an increased supply of their hormones to enable the person's heart to beat faster and to give him more energy for either fight or flight. That's a good thing.

However, if a person sits at high noon in the security of his own home and allows his mind to think of burglars and charging bulls, his emotional center will send identical alarm messages to the glands, heart and blood pressure centers just as it would if the individual were actually being attacked by a wild boar.

Shakespeare evidently knew enough of psychology to recognize that people become sick from unconfessed sin. It was the murder memory of Duncan that produced psychosomatic overtones in Macbeth. When Macbeth asked the physician about the illness, he replied:

*“Not so sick, my lord,
As she is troubled
With thick-coming fancies,
That keep her from her rest.”*

The same question could be asked of physicians today:

*“Canst thou not minister to the mind diseas'd,
Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow,
Raze out the written troubles of the brain,
And with some sweet oblivious antidote,
Cleanse the stuff'd bosom of that perilous stuff
Which weights upon the heart.”*

(McMillen, None of These Diseases, page 65, Macbeth v. 3. 38, 40)

Anxiety is a thinking problem initially. Then it becomes a belief problem, and finally it shows up as an emotional problem. Worry is a belief in a negative outcome. Fear is the conviction of a dire outcome. Besides these physical symptoms, people may experience dread, a sense of impending doom, fear of losing control, or even the feeling that death is imminent.

The Sources of Anxiety

The Causes of Anxiety

The exact causes of anxiety are not known, but it is likely that a combination of factors plays a part. Some factors that increase the risk of developing anxiety include:

Genetics:

People with a close family member with anxiety or anxiety disorders also have a greater risk of having anxiety. That may be because anxiety is passed on to children from parents. You may be genetically disposed to worry and fear. A parent's fears, anxieties, and worries often become the child's anxieties. It is important to note, however, that people who don't have family members with the condition still develop anxiety. Though anxiety may run in your family, you are still accountable for your anxious thoughts. Anxiety is not inevitable. It is a pattern learned and repeated.

Traumatic experiences:

A difficult, stressful, or traumatic experience can also trigger the onset of an anxiety attack. For example, being bitten by a dog as a child might trigger a fear of dogs in adulthood.

An Overactive Imagination:

People who have anxiety have an overactive brain. Their brain is hyperactive. They have a good imagination. It creates scenarios and situations that do not yet exist, but they feel real. In fact, 99% of the time worry is not valid and is only imagined ahead of time, because of a hyperactive brain. Anxiety is an emotion based on a future event that hasn't happened yet.

Mistrust and Unbelief:

Yes, I know, now I've gone from preaching to meddling. But it is true. When we have negative thoughts about ourselves, other people, and the world in general, we are believing lies. Believing a lie is to embrace a lie of the devil. It is to contradict the word of God, and in effect believes the opposite of what God says. Jesus said, "*Fear not, little flock, it is the Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom*" but you worry about tomorrow's provisions. Is that not rejecting the word of the Lord?

Is it not casting a vote that His promises are not true? When the Lord says, "*Cast all your care upon Him for He cares for you*" but you cling tightly to your anxiety, refusing to let it go, is that not telling God you don't trust Him?

Sayings (self-talk)

Anxious thoughts that create worry and fear.

To rid ourselves of anxious thoughts, we must first discover what they are and that they are there within our minds. Fear is behind all anxiety. What are your fearful thoughts? Count them. Do a mental inventory. Track them down. Destroy them with the word of God.

1. I've got such bad luck.
2. Bad things always happen to me.
3. I never catch a break.
4. Someone is out to get me.
5. Something bad is going to happen. I feel it.
6. I've got a bad feeling about tomorrow.
7. If one more thing goes wrong...
8. Murphy's law is at work again.
9. I feel like there is a dark cloud over me.
10. Bad luck follows me everywhere.
11. Everything I touch turns to mold.
12. Bad luck will rub off if I shake hands with you.
13. Don't say something good or something bad will happen.
14. Knock on wood.
15. If I didn't have bad luck, I'd have no luck at all.
16. Just once I'd like things to go well.

There are many more than we can list here. Go to the Appendix and review *The Lies We Tell Ourselves* and check off those thoughts you have when you are emotionally distressed.

Ten Distorted Thought Patterns

Untruthful Thoughts (lies of Satan)

1. All-or-Nothing (expecting perfection)
2. Overgeneralization (Murphy's law, pessimism)
3. Mental Filter (gloom and doom)
4. Disqualifying Positives (minimizing good things)
5. Mind Reading (reading people's thoughts, motives)
6. Fortune Telling (predicting disaster)
7. Magnification (dwelling on small things, blowing them up)
8. Should-itis (demanding fairness, blame and shame)
9. Name Calling / Labeling (derogatory name calling)
10. Personalizing Everything (feeling responsible, pity party)

Counteract your negative thoughts about yourself with God's thoughts about you.

Solutions (God's truth)

The Biblical Cure for Anxiety

God has given us great and exceeding precious promises by which we can know his peace in times of trouble. But no amount of reading or quoting Scripture can take away your anxiety. Anxiety has to be exchanged. It needs to be laid down. You have to stop carrying it. You must find rest to your soul in *"casting all your care upon Him, because he cares for you."* (1 Peter 5:7)

Casting your anxiety, worry, and fear on him is to recognize the thoughts, fears and doubts that are bombarding your thought life, and deliberately wrestling them into subjection. They do not need to rule over you. They are not true. They are lies of Satan. They are unbelief, just as if you were to say, "I refuse to believe you will protect and keep me."

Scriptures on Anxiety

God has given us the riches of His word regarding our anxieties. Here are just a few:

2 Timothy 1:7

For God has not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.

1 John 4:18-20

¹⁸ There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. ¹⁹ We love because he first loved us.

Isaiah 51:12-13

"I, even I, am he who comforts you. Who are you that you fear mere mortals, human beings who are but grass, ¹³ that you forget the LORD your Maker, who stretches out the heavens and who lays the foundations of the earth, that you live in constant terror every day because of the wrath of the oppressor, who is bent on destruction? For where is the wrath of the oppressor?"

Isaiah 54:14-17

"In righteousness you will be established: Tyranny will be far from you; you will have nothing to fear. Terror will be far removed; it will not come near you. ¹⁵ If anyone does attack you, it will not be my doing; whoever attacks you will surrender to you. ¹⁶ "See, it is I who created the blacksmith who fans the coals into flame and forges a weapon fit for its work. And it is I who have created the destroyer to wreak havoc; ¹⁷ no weapon forged against you will prevail, and you will refute every tongue that accuses you. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and this is their vindication from me," declares the LORD.

In our Appendix we have provided you with Scriptures concerning anxiety and fear. Read them. Look them up. Mark important ones in your Bible, or in the back of your Bible. Write them on a card and put them in plain sight on your refrigerator. Memorize them.

Say them out loud. There is something about hearing your own voice that makes it more convincing to your brain. Your brain needs to hear your mouth speak the truth.

God's word is filled with promises and assurances of peace for every child of God.

Visit our Appendix for helps for overcoming anxiety.

<http://www.prayertoday.org/2024/PDF/PDF365 Promises.pdf>

Stop Here!

Don't read any further until you have digested, applied, and used what you've just read.

Avoid overload. Read only one chapter a week.

Personal Response to Anxiety

1. How did this subject make you feel? Sad, confused, upset, depressed, guilty, condemned, enlightened, happy, hopeful, etc.?
2. Was this chapter helpful in identifying some of your own Stinkin' Thinkin'? If so what specifically?
3. What 3 negative thoughts do you need to change? What are they and why are they distortions of truth?
4. What 3 or more biblical truths, verses, or promises do you need to digest and make a firm part of your thoughts and beliefs?

Group Discussion Questions

1. What do you worry about most often? What makes you anxious?
2. What is your greatest fear or worry in life? Describe it.
3. Do you believe in Murphy's Law? Does it ever feel like it's true?
4. What anxiety, worry, or fear often knocks on your door?
5. Has any anxiety, worry, or fear ever come to pass? When? How often?

Download our helps and tools at go to www.PrayerToday.org/Stinkin.htm

**10 Sermons on Stinkin' Thinkin'
365 Promises of God
Exercises & Forms in 8.5x11 PDF format**