

Overwhelmed by Anxiety?

Scripture: Matthew 6:25–34

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Anxiety, fear, worry, and stress are familiar words in our day, and familiar experiences to many. More and more we're hearing of an extreme form of anxiety referred to as a "panic attack."

What was once a rare and extreme example of anxiety has become frighteningly common in our society. Panic attacks are usually related to an unfounded fear—one so overwhelming and so overpowering that it clutches a person's heart, makes it beat faster, produces chills or perspiration, and the person feels completely unable to cope with the moment.

Anxiety is, at its core, an inappropriate response in light of the circumstances. It's very different from the cares and concerns in life that cause people to attend to business in a responsible way. Stress and pressure are not the enemies. In fact, often they're good things, strengthening us to accomplish the challenges God sets before us in life.

The apostle Paul wrote that apart from the unrelenting external pressure he had to face, such as persecution, hardship, and imprisonment, he also had the daily internal pressure "of concern for all the churches" (2 Corinthians 11:28). In spite of that, he had room in his heart to feel the anxiety of others, for he went on to write, "Who is weak without my being weak? Who is led into sin without my intense concern?" (2 Corinthians 11:29). He wouldn't have had it any other way, though.

In fact, that kind of response to pressure is what Paul looked for in those who would serve with him. Note how he commended Timothy to the Philippian church: "I have no one else of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare" (Philippians 2:20; cf. 1 Corinthians 4:17). *Anyone* who knows and loves Jesus Christ is capable of handling pressure like that.

The *wrong* way to handle the stresses of life is to worry about them. Jesus Himself said three times, "Do not be anxious" (Matthew 6:25, 31, 34). Paul later reiterated, "Be anxious for nothing" (Philippians 4:6). *Worry at any time is a sin* because it violates the clear commands of Scripture.

We allow our daily concerns to turn into worry—and therefore sin—when our thoughts become focused on changing the future instead of doing our best to handle our present circumstances.

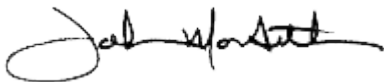
Such thoughts are unproductive. They end up controlling us—though it should be the other way around—and cause us to neglect other responsibilities and relationships. That brings on legitimate feelings of guilt. If we don't deal with those feelings in a productive manner by getting back on track with our duties in life, we'll lose hope instead of finding answers. Anxiety, left unresolved, can debilitate one's mind and body—and even lead to panic attacks.

I am particularly concerned about the solutions some Christians offer to the problem of anxiety. A survey of the books put out on the topic by evangelical publishing houses is telling. Most are formulaic, anecdotal, or psychological in orientation. They contain a lot of nice stories, but not many references to Scripture. And when Scripture *is* employed, it is often incidental and without regard for its context. That kind of lip service to God's Word turns rich, biblical truth into shallow incantations. "If you do *this* and *this*, then God must do *that*."

To tackle anxiety in a biblical fashion, first we need to know the primary Scripture passages on the topic. Then we need to consider those passages in their context—not merely cite and recite them unthinkingly or use them as props for a nice story or a suggested behavior-modifying technique. As a person "thinks within himself, so he is" (Proverbs 23:7).

We need to shatter modern misconceptions and realign our thinking on anxiety with what God says about it in His Word, and why. Only then will we be able to apply His precious Word to our hearts. We won't just know we're not to worry; we'll have confidence and success in doing something about it.

And we can be aggressive in our approach. I'm calling this series *Attacking Anxiety* because I want you to know you can attack this crippling foe and win. Even if you've struggled with anxiety for years, I want to give you the encouragement you need to get back into battle.



(Adapted from [Anxious for Nothing](#).)

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