

Antidote for Anxiety

by Beverly Littau

Do you **worry** about a great number of things? Do you often get **nervous** about things that most likely will not happen? Do you often attempt to control things in order to avoid uncertain outcomes and then feel **uneasy** when you can't? Do you feel **edgy** even when you can't put your finger on exactly why you feel that way?

If you have answered yes to one or more of these questions, then you may suffer from anxiety. Joe, who describes himself as anxious, says that anxiety is the thing that "runs my life." Paula says that she "rarely feels relaxed."

Anxious people's days are filled with worries and concerns that are sometimes "free-floating." They may be anxious even when they don't know why. They don't experience life as richly satisfying and full. Instead, they are always on the lookout for what could go wrong.

There are many verses in the Bible that address worry and anxiety, but one that may be especially helpful is found in **Philippians 4:6-7**. Paul is writing to the church at Philippi during a time in which he is under house arrest. His life was very uncertain, and his circumstances were out of his control, but read what he writes:

"Don't worry about anything; Instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. If you do this, you will experience God's peace, which is far more wonderful than the human mind can understand. His peace will guard your heart and minds as you live in Christ Jesus."

In these two verses, Paul gives us a way to live in peace and not be ruled by anxiety, fear, and worry. He tells us what to do, what not to do, and what the result will be. Let's take it one phrase at a time.

First, Paul tells us not to worry about anything. Other translations tell us not to be anxious about anything. He stops short of calling anxiety a sin in this passage, but he does make it clear that living anxiety-free is what God desires for a Christian.

Next, after telling us not to worry, he tells us to pray about everything, including the things that concern us in our daily lives. But even more importantly, he tells us to pray with a thankful heart, thanking God for the things he has done.

How many anxious Christians spend a lot more time worrying than praying and thanking? I suspect that many would admit to that. I know that used to be true in my life. At some point (probably after hearing a challenging sermon) I made a serious commitment to turn my worrying thoughts into prayers. I also decided to develop a thankful heart, something that was lacking in my life.

Some years ago, I began to keep a special journal where I listed the things that God had done for me—answered prayers and other evidences of his hand in my life. I learned to go to that journal and read of God's blessings in my life when I started to be concerned about a new situation. It was amazing how simply poring over that list would calm my anxious spirit and bring me assurance of God's awareness of my problem and his control over it. That enabled me to pray about my concerns with a heart of faith and thanksgiving.

Finally, after telling us not to worry, but to pray with thanksgiving, Paul tells us that if we do those things we will have God's peace in our hearts. Then, as if that weren't enough, he tells us that

God's peace will guard our hearts and minds as we live in Christ Jesus.

To me, that means that as I practice not being anxious, praying, and being thankful, that will become the norm for me. The more it becomes the norm, the more my heart and mind will be guarded from future attacks of anxiety. Why? I believe that when we have a history of worry and anxiety, we then develop a *habit* of worry and anxiety. We literally do not know how to feel anything else. By practicing new ways of dealing with problems, we develop a new habit of choosing to pray and be thankful instead of letting anxiety overtake us. As a result, we are not as susceptible to satan's attacks on our minds and hearts. We have spiritual muscles!

This way of thinking and living takes practice, and lots of it, but every journey begins with the first step. You can begin today to move toward anxiety-free living. It means learning to live out of the truth of God's word (that he loves you, that he has all things under his control) instead of living out of the lies in your head.

You may find it helpful to meet with a prayer partner or a counselor who can assist you along the way. The journey will take time, effort, and practice, but it will be worth it in the end because you will begin to experience the abundant life that Jesus talked about!

Bible Verses to Consider

I Peter 5:7 "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you."

Psalms 34:10 b "Those who seek the LORD lack no good thing."

Isaiah 41:10 "So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God."

Deuteronomy 31:7-8 "The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged."

Matthew 11:28 "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

Romans 8:38-39 "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

II Timothy 1:7 "For God did not give us a spirit of fear, but a spirit of power, love and a sound mind."

Psalms 28:7 "The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and I am helped. My heart leaps for joy and I will give thanks to him in song."