

High Anxiety to Deep Depression: An honest discussion about the causes of anxiety and depression and dive into the hope and healing Scripture promises, beginning with the cross

Reality: Anxiety and depression are real, and Scripture speaks directly to their reality, causes, and solutions. They also can have both simple or complex causes and resolutions. We have taken many sources, both secular and Biblical, and come to these definitions:

- Anxiety—Intense, excessive, and persistent worry and fear about everyday situations. Fast heart rate, rapid breathing, sweating, and feeling tired may occur.
- Depression—A mood disorder characterized by prolonged feelings of sadness and loss of interest in daily activities. Includes difficulty thinking, significant increase or decrease in appetite and time spent sleeping, feelings of dejection and hopelessness.

Question

- Is there anxiety that is necessary?

Causes/Symptoms

What are some things that cause our anxiety/depression to flare up and are there certain situations where it seems to always come up?

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Health issues (biological)• Fear of the unknown (change)• Seemingly impossible situations• Excessive focus on self (pride)• Unrealistic expectations• Isolation, feeling that one is worthless or not valuable | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Misplaced identity (low self-esteem)• Social Media• Failure• Trauma/Loss• Control/Perfectionism• Conflict in relationships |
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Biblical Examples: What are the triggers, fears, failures for each of these stories and characters?

- Hannah (1 Samuel 1:6-8)
- Elijah (1 Kings 19)
- Jeremiah (Jer 9:1, 15:10-21)
- David (Psalm 22:2, 10-11, 69:1-3, 77:8-10)
- Saul (1 Samuel 16:14-23)
- Job (Job 3)
- Paul (2 Cor 7:5, 12:7-10)
- Jesus (Luke 22:44)
- Moses (Exodus 3:10-4:17)

Are there any observations or truths we can draw from these examples?

—None of these examples in Scripture were remembered for their Anxiety and times of depression. Anxiety **did NOT** define these people and it **does NOT** define you.

Here's a major lie we're fed, though: My feelings and emotions are impossibly overwhelming and they are out of my control

Hope & Healing: You'll fight the battle either outside yourself or inside. If you refuse to follow Christ's commands it will turn inside you which is much harder -Dustin T

Consider these suggestions in light of the example of Naaman in 2 Kings 5

1. Change is anchored in the Cross (Rom. 5:8-11; Eph. 2:1-5)
 - a. Believe in the power of the Cross (Eph 3:20-21, 1 Cor 1:18)
2. No change=No change
3. Anxiety and Depression decrease with service to others. Why? (2 Cor. 5:15-16; Phil. 2:3-4, Acts 20:35)
4. Make your emotions match the truth (Phil. 4:4-8)
 - a. Afraid or afraid of being afraid? (2 Tim. 1:7, 2 Cor. 4:16-18)
 - i. Circumstances are not what we are called to control, but we can choose our response to them in obedience to Christ, including our emotions
 - b. Reset expectations
 - c. Take your thoughts captive--get something new on which to meditate and renew your thinking (Rom. 12:1-2, 2 Cor. 10:5, Psalm 40:11-12)
 - i. 2 Cor 1:3-7
 - ii. 2 Cor 4:8-9
 - iii. 1 Samuel 7:12 (Ebenezer)
5. Forget self-esteem: re-identify yourself (Col. 3:3; Rom. 8:9-16; 2 Cor. 5:17)
6. If anxiety is a control issue
 - a. Giving control up to God (1 Peter 5:6-7)
 - b. Recognising my weakness and God's strength (Matthew 11:28-30)
7. Work to become thankful! (Rom. 5:3, James 1:2; Psa. 50:23, 2 Cor 12:8-9)
8. Worship! (Psa. 16:8; 77:11-20; 139:13-16)
9. Repent (2 Cor. 7:8-12; Psa. 51:16-17)
10. Get counseling and/or accountability (this can take many forms, including professional help), talk to a friend (James 5:16)
11. Unplug from (social) media
12. Evaluate your diet and nutrition (see your doctor?)
13. Exercise
14. Sleep well (at night!)

15 Coping Tips

1. Change "What If's" to "So What"
2. Stay in the present.
3. Don't judge your feelings.
4. Thoughts and feelings are NOT actions.
5. What am I telling myself that is scaring me?
6. I am what I tell myself.
7. The more I do, the more I can do.
8. I've done it before, I CAN do it again!
9. I am the same person, here or in my safe place.

10. I can handle it, nothing terrible will happen.
11. The feelings are distressing, NOT dangerous.
12. In reality, there is nothing that can hurt me here.
13. The anxiety can only go so high and then it comes down.
14. SLOW DOWN
15. Take slow, deep breaths.

Resources:

[“One Easy Question Can Help Break the Anxiety Cycle,”](#) Psychology Today
(online) (Phil. 4:4-9)

[“How to Break the Cycle of Worry and Anxiety,”](#) The Courage (online) (2 Cor. 10:5)

[“Breaking the Cycle of Anxiety and Control,”](#) Crossroads Professional Counseling
(online) (Psa. 107:10; Luke 12:25-26)

[“Breaking the Cycle of Perfectionism: Tips from a Christian Counselor, Part I”](#)
Seattle Christian Counseling (online) (Rom. 12:3)

[“Breaking the Cycle of Perfectionism: Tips from a Christian Counselor, Part II”](#)
Seattle Christian Counseling (online) (Rom. 12:3)

The Search For Significance: Seeing Your True Worth Through God's Eyes
Robert McGee (book) (Col. 3:1-2)

The Scars that Shaped Me Vaneetha Rendall Risner (book)

[“You Can Be Anxious about Nothing”](#) Kim Cash Tate, Desiring God (online) (Phil. 4:6)

Anxious for Nothing. Max Lucado (book)

[“Biological Explanations of Anxiety Disorders”](#) Gracepoint Wellness (online) (Rom. 12:2)

“Anxiety and Your Body” Lisa Minshull (below)

Anxiety and Your Body

First of all, it is **NORMAL** to be worried or anxious sometimes. The teen and young adult years are especially anxious for many people, but you will be anxious many times throughout your life. There are a couple of reasons that teens get worried more easily. First, think of all the new things you are doing—new classes, new teachers, new jobs/careers, new friends, new places, learning to drive, new activities, new boyfriend/girlfriends. Secondly, your brain and body is changing and growing! Think of how much has changed since you were a child. One example of a physical change that happens in your brain is your sleep patterns. Children go to bed early and get up early very often. As a teen your brain changes so that you like to stay up late—very late sometimes—and sleep late.

The teen years are an excellent time to learn to cope with anxiety. You can learn ways to help you “take captive every thought,” “whatever is pure and lovely...”, think on these things” and “do not be anxious about anything.” Remember that anxiety is not your identity!

What is anxiety? Anxiety arises from fear. Fear is a protective mechanism designed to protect us from danger and keeps us alive! Unfortunately, both real and imagined threats can trigger the fear response that perpetuate the anxiety cycle. When you are afraid, your brain immediately sends a message to your body that you are in danger. Your body then prepares for “fight or flight”—to physically attack the danger or to run from it. Adrenaline is released to make your heart rate, breathing rate and blood pressure rise. Your pupils dilate so you notice everything around you and you are wide awake instantly. Your palms get sweaty, and you may break out in a cold sweat. You get more blood flow to your muscles, which are tense and ready for action.

It’s easy to see why all of those things would be helpful when you have a bear attacking you, but when you are afraid you are going to fail a test, it’s not quite as effective! Unfortunately, your body still has the same response, leaving you a jittery, nauseated, sweaty mess to take your exam. Having a fear response when you’re lying in bed, trying to go to sleep is a sure guarantee that you won’t be going to sleep anytime soon—unless you stop that cycle.

Anxiety becomes worse when the ‘fear of fear’ trumps the reality of the situation. Instead of being fearful of an actual threat, your imagined fear initiates the same response in your brain and creates the neurobiological sensations of fear. When the fear is real, your body’s response is usually quickly over—the bear that was chasing you either catches you or you escape! When the fear is imagined, your mind keeps going over and over that thought, keeping your body in a stress cycle for long periods of time. This kind of stress can lead to depression, and a feeling of hopelessness and despair.

One of the ways to reduce anxiety and break this cycle is called the “reality check.” Learning how to recognize when a fear is healthy, truthful, and based in reality (such as a growling dog) or unrealistic and imaginary (such as what might happen tomorrow) is a coping mechanism that

people of all ages can utilize. Simply asking, "Is this threat real or imagined?" is a start to breaking the anxiety cycle. If the threat is imagined, change the channel in your brain! Practice controlling your thoughts. Think about something good, and if you can't do that then reset your brain by reading, solving a puzzle, journaling, or exercising. Replace the fearful thoughts with good thoughts, or good activities, and make your emotions match the truth!

Some suggestions for ways to break the cycle of anxious thoughts are:

- **Use progressive muscle relaxation to release muscle tension**
- **Use deep breathing (in for four, hold for four, out for four)**
- **Take a daily walk or begin an exercise routine**
- **Talk to a friend or parent and tell them your fears, but don't stop with that. Also tell them the positives in your life, about times that you handled something well, or how you would handle your fear if it really happened. Ask about how they handled that fear or failure in the past.**
- **Start journaling. Write down 3 good things about your day every night when you go to bed. Or keep an answered prayer or gratitude journal. Keep your journaling as positive as you can, to help train your brain to think positively**
- **Create a worry box to put the worries away**
- **Give your Mom a hug—the touch of another person helps relieve stress! If your Mom's not around, give your pet a hug—pets can also relieve stress.**
- **Serve others. Serving other people will get your mind off yourself and give you a new perspective.**
- **Get up and do something! The act of getting up and getting dressed will help you to calm your fears.**
- **Read your Bible. Meditating on the truth is the best way to make your emotions match the truth.**
- **Seek wise counsel. Sometimes it's enough to talk to friends or parents about your anxiety. Sometimes, though, you need the advice of someone with more wisdom and experience like a counselor or therapist. God gave us Christian counselors and therapists to help us get through tough places, and you should never be afraid to ask for help when you feel that you are unable to control your anxiety or depression. They can also prescribe medicine that can help when you have an imbalance in your hormones or brain.**

Is your life out of balance?

Poor diet/caffeine/alcohol: Vitamins and proper nutrients are vital for your brain's growth and health. This coincides with your ability to buy yourself junk food and fill up on it, which is not a good combination! Caffeine also heightens anxiety because the physical response to caffeine is similar to a stress response—nervousness, restlessness, and an increased heart rate. Alcohol is a depressant and will definitely increase depression. A diet full of sugar makes your body not handle stress as well, and gives you “highs and lows” in energy levels. If you are having problems with anxiety, watch what you eat, and increase the amounts of fruits and vegetables in your diet.

- *Simple* carbohydrates include baked goods, pasta and French fries. After the “feel good” wears off, your mood and energy levels crash. *Complex* carbs such as oatmeal, whole wheat pasta and whole grain breads can raise serotonin levels so your mood stays steady or improves.
- Fruits and vegetables have super powers. For example, bananas contain magnesium (associated with reducing anxiety), brown rice increases serotonin/thiamine (to support sociability), and spinach contains folate (to reduce agitation and improve sleep).
- Stay hydrated. Irritability is the first sign of dehydration so drink plenty of water.

Poor sleep: Your new sleep patterns of staying up late and sleeping late do not always fit in with the reality of life. You wake up tired, help yourself to caffeine to stay awake and then have no energy so sit and stare at your phone for hours. Not getting enough sleep will definitely heighten your anxiety, as do caffeine and too much screen time. When you are feeling anxious make a pattern of going to bed earlier, avoiding caffeine, and not looking at screens for at least an hour before you go to bed. Usually the very worst time for anxiety is late at night. Read the Psalms and see how many were David feeling anxious in the middle of the night! This is a time when you are not able to take much action, so you need to control your thoughts. Present your requests to your loving God and then replace the thoughts of your fears with something calming to you. Plan a vacation, compose a poem, write a story, visualize a great basketball move, build a fabulous treehouse in your mind!

Screen time: Recent studies show that adolescents who spend more than seven hours a day on screens were twice as likely as those spending one hour to have been diagnosed with anxiety or depression. Those who used screens for 4 hours a day also had lower psychological well-being than those who used only 1 hour a day.

Limit your screen time! Get an app that monitors how much screen time you use and if necessary, be accountable to someone else.

Check your schedule! Sometimes the feeling of being anxious and overwhelmed is related to a crazy busy schedule—you actually don't have enough hours in the day to do

everything you need to do. Take a careful look at your schedule, maybe with someone you trust, and look for things that you can remove from your schedule or postpone to a later time. Think about making commitments before you make them, and consider if saying yes to a social event will cause you more anxiety in the end because you can't keep up with your responsibilities.

Hormones: Girls especially go through hormone cycles that cause changes in mood. Because this is relatively new for teens, it sometimes helps to do a mood journal to coordinate with your monthly cycle. This helps you see patterns and it may help to know that you are particularly anxious or sad on a certain day because of your hormonal cycle.

Exercise: Our bodies were made to move. Physical activity releases a hormone that makes you feel good--hopeful and excited. Have you heard of a runner's high? As a child you probably played and moved much more. Now that you're older you may do nearly everything at a desk, in a classroom or on a screen. You have increased responsibility and stress, and less of the physical activity that helps you feel hopeful. Get in a habit of physical activity. It will make your body and your brain healthier!

Hopefully a little understanding of your body's role in anxiety gives you a little more ammunition for your fight against feeling anxious. Your fears may not be based on reality, but your struggle is real. Just because you are struggling doesn't mean you are failing! This trial can lead to real growth and maturity, both spiritually and physically. *"Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."*

James 1:2-4 ESV