

# How to Handle Anxiety

Philippians 4:6-9

## Intro

Anxiety, worry, fear and tension are some of the most destructive forces we can face. They sap our strength and slowly undermine our faith, keeping us from experiencing a healthy life. So many crazy things are going on around us today - wars, conflicts, persecution, violence, crime, natural disasters, terrorism, economic uncertainty, unemployment, divisions, disease, and death. We fear for our children's future, we fear for our families, our marriages, we fear for our financial future, we fear for our safety. The list goes on and on. There is actually a lot we could potentially be anxious about.

According to the Anxiety Disorders Association of Canada, "one in four Canadians (25%) will have at least one anxiety disorder in their lifetime". Again, important to note that the statistic mentioned above pertains to generalized anxiety disorder only. There are 7 other anxiety disorders that are not part of this statistic. In fact, anxiety is the most common mental illness in Canada (Stats from Sept. 2013).

## Seven Categories of Anxiety Disorder

1/ *Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD)*: It is characterized by persistent, excessive, and unrealistic worry about everyday things. People with this disorder experience excessive anxiety and worry, often expecting the worst even when there is no apparent reason for concern. They anticipate disaster and may be overly concerned about money, health, marriage, family, work, or other issues.

2/ *Social Phobia*: is an anxiety disorder in which a person has an excessive and unreasonable fear of social situations. Intense nervousness and self-consciousness arise from a fear of being closely watched, judged, and criticized by others.

3/ *Panic Disorder*: People with panic disorder experience unexpected and repeated panic attacks. They become terrified that they may have more attacks and fear that something bad will happen because of the attack - such as going crazy, losing control or dying.

4/ *Agoraphobia*: is a disorder in which you fear and often avoid places or situations that might cause you to panic and make you feel trapped, helpless or embarrassed.

5/ *Phobias*: people with specific phobias, or strong irrational fear reactions, work hard to avoid common places, situations, or objects even though they know there's no threat or danger. The fear may not make any sense, but they feel powerless to stop it. Specific phobias commonly focus on animals, insects, germs, heights, thunder, driving, public transportation, flying, dental or medical procedures, and elevators.

6/ *Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)*: a condition of persistent mental and emotional stress occurring as a result of injury or severe psychological shock, typically involving disturbance of sleep and constant vivid recall of the experience, with dulled responses to others and to the outside world.

*7/ Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD):* is a mental disorder where people feel the need to check things repeatedly, perform certain routines repeatedly (called "rituals"), or have certain thoughts repeatedly. People are unable to control either the thoughts or the activities. Common activities include hand washing, counting of things, and checking to see if a door is locked many times. Some may have difficulty throwing things out – hoarding excessively.

I need to mention that some of these Anxiety Disorders that are severe need medical attention and care. This is why I strongly encourage anyone who thinks they may suffer from acute anxiety to see their doctor for a medical screening and interview to determine if this is the case in their situation. All the counselling in the world will not alleviate certain anxieties if it is caused by physiological factors.

For instance *Serotonin* is a neurotransmitter, regulating signals between neurons in the brain. It is a natural chemical in our bodies that is responsible for maintaining mood balance and if someone has a deficiency of serotonin it can lead to depression and anxiety disorder.

### Some Anxiety Isn't Bad

In moderation and control, anxiety isn't always a bad thing. In fact, anxiety can help you stay alert and focused, motivate you to action, and to solve problems. Anxiety is the body's natural response to danger, an automatic alarm that goes off when you feel threatened, under pressure, or facing a stressful situation. But when anxiety is constant or overwhelming, when it interferes with your relationships and activities, it stops being functional—that's when you've crossed the line from normal, productive anxiety into the area of anxiety disorders.

But today I want to talk about anxiety in general terms. It often happens to people who on the average are healthy but may go through an episode of anxiety. Please look with me in the Bible to Philippians chapter 4.

### Philippians 4:6

*“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.”*

The English word "anxious" is derived from the Latin word *anxius* and akin to *angere* which means to strangle. Isn't that what anxiety does to most of people – it strangles them and renders them ineffective in their emotional spiritual life and in God's kingdom work?

*“Do not be anxious”* is a command (imperative mood; not a suggestion or an option and it is in the present tense which calls for continual action). Paul says that the habit of our life is to not be anxious. Paul is giving a prohibition which forbids the continuance of an action already habitually going on. In other words, believers who habitually worry are to stop and to continually cease from worrying. Worry (with its fears) constantly wants to take over and control us. Therefore we need to continually cease from being anxious, almost on a daily bases.

The next think we read in Philippians 4:6 is, *“But in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.”* But in every situation that you are anxious pray. Call on God and ask Him to intervene and help you. There are 3 synonyms used here: prayer, petition and requests. They all refer to seeking God for help but also with thanksgiving. Thankful prayer brings release from fear and anxiety, because it affirms God's sovereign control over every situation.

Thanksgiving is also praise – to praise and worship Him is a powerful means of overcoming worry and anxious feelings. It helps to get the focus off ourselves and unto the Lord.

### **Philippians 4:7**

When we present our prayers, petitions and thanksgiving to God the next promise is that we will experience His peace. Philippians 4:7 says, “*And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*”

The peace (Greek: *eirene*) spoken here is tranquility of mind based on a right relationship with God. The verb form for peace in Greek means "to hold together." You experience peace when nothing frightens you because you know everything is under God's control. No matter what happens, you know that everything between you and God is right and that He is sovereign over everything that happens to you. When you remember that everything God is doing in your life is for your good - that produces peace.

Repeat after me: “***Everything God is doing in my life is for my good.***”

Peace has nothing to do with circumstances or feelings. Spiritual peace doesn't necessarily involve peaceful circumstances. However, if you carry a peaceful heart into turbulent circumstances, you'll still experience peace. This Fruit of the Spirit, peace, is a freedom from the fear of what might happen in the future and a freedom in the midst of present troubles, evil, pain and sickness.

Now, this supernatural peace “*transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*” It surpasses human intellect and understanding. It is experienced in a transcendent calm that lifts the believer above the most difficult trial. Those who honour God and trust Him will experience the blessings of His perfect peace. Shalom, shalom!

God's peace will guard the believer's heart and mind from anxiety, doubt and worry. But Paul reminds us that true peace is not available through any human source, but only in Christ Jesus.

### **Philippians 4:8**

Philippians 4:6, gives believers a powerful and direct command to cast their worries on God, though for someone with acute anxiety, it's not always that easy. With extreme anxiety a person is exasperated by just simply praying when they can barely stop their own thoughts to pray in the first place.

Thankfully, verse 8 promises something more than “just pray.” Look with me at Philippians 4:8, “*Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.*”

This verse points out advice that anxiety strugglers often miss: Paul urges them to think on things that are true. Almost every anxious thought we have gets fortified with falsehood and irrationality. Anxiety feeds off fear.

### **Anxiety is Fear**

Worry can range from frustrating redundant thoughts to completely paralyzing panic and paralyzing fear. Practically all anxiety is rooted in fear, whether we are afraid of losing control or dying or failing

or being rejected. Fear turns into true anxiety and then it takes power over us and our lives. Those who struggle with anxiety disorders understand this feeling, often frustrated by anxiety's weight and control.

Fear is a tool that Satan uses against us to make us miserable and destroy our lives. It begins as a thought and then creates emotions that can rule us. It often becomes a strong, intense feeling that tries to move us to make a foolish action or tries to prevent us from doing something that would be good for us. 1 Timothy 1:7 says, "*For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.*" As a believer in Christ Jesus I have been given power and love and a sound mind.

What does a sound mind mean in this verse? The original Greek word here is *soproneo*. It is a compound word which pictures a mind that has been delivered, rescued, revived, salvaged, and protected and is now safe and secure. If your mind is tempted to succumb to fear, you can allow God's Word and the Holy Spirit to work in you to deliver, rescue, revive, and salvage your mind. This means your rationale, logic, and emotions can be shielded from the illogically absurd, unfounded, and crazy thoughts that have tried to grip your mind in the past. All you have to do is grab hold of God's Word and His Spirit. With this in mind this verse of 1 Timothy 1:7 would read like this:

*"God has not given you a spirit of fear, but of power and of love — He has given you a mind that has been delivered, rescued, revived, salvaged, protected, and brought into a place of safety and security so that it is no longer affected by illogical, unfounded, and absurd thoughts."*

**Philippians 4:8**, "*Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.*"

Whatever is true: means to read, meditate on the Word of God. God's Word often exposes the lies and deceptions in our lives. Jesus said, "*If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.*" (John 8:31-32).

Whatever is honourable: means whatever is noble and worthy of respect. Believers must not think on what is temporal, mundane, trivial useless thoughts, but rather on what is worthy of awe, adoration and praise.

Whatever is right: It is to think on whatever is in perfect harmony with God's eternal unchanging standards and His will for our lives.

Whatever is pure: That which is morally clean, and acceptable to God.

Whatever is lovely: Think on things that are gracious, and sweet. Things that are pleasing, attractive and amiable before God.

Whatever is admirable: It means whatever is highly regarded or well thought of; things of good repute.

Our thinking should also be focused on anything that is *excellent*: that which is very good, superb, marvelous and wonderful. Also our thinking focused on what is *praiseworthy*: that which glorifies God, honours Him and exalts Him.

In the end we are told to "think about such things" or dwell on these things. This phrase means more than just entertain thoughts but it means to evaluate, to consider and to set your mind in this way of thinking.

Read this passage of Philippians 4:6-8 in times of anxiety. When a turbulent flight has turned you into an episode of panic or something has tricked you into believing that something awful is going to happen to you. Deal with your anxiety by believing that God is there to guard your heart and mind. It's the only way.

### **Conclusion**

Have you ever surrendered your life to God? Do you have the fruit of God's Spirit in your life: love, joy, and peace? Is your conscience cleansed of guilt before God? Have you released your fears, your anger, your doubts, and all your sins and clung to Him with all your strength? Have you given Him your heart, your life? Whatever pain or sorrow our life holds for us, faith in God's Word will lead us to rejoice in our short time on earth.

### Testimony of Linda Long

“God placed an anointed woman of God in my life, Mildred Dalton. She was an older, very wise servant of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. She began to take me under her wing and teach me God’s ways. She informed me that I was sowing all kinds of bad seeds over myself with the words that I spoke. *‘Oh I’m going crazy and I am afraid I am having a nervous breakdown.’* Sister Dalton told me where the precious promises were in God’s Word for my situation. She had walked through the same attack earlier in her Christian life. She would tell me ‘Listen to me, don’t listen to the devil.’ I began to quote God’s Word over myself every day. *For God has not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind (2 Timothy 1:7).* When I found this Scripture, I stood on it with everything in me. Every time I would start to feel panicky, I would quote this Scripture over myself. You see, I didn’t have to do anything but stand on God’s Word. God’s Word is medicine to those whose find it. Of course you can’t claim God’s promises if you don’t serve him, but if you are a believer; then it will work for you. I began to search the Bible for God’s promises for me. I wrote all of those down and quoted them daily over myself. I continued to pray and ask God for his strength and help. In the midst of the storm, I used the sword of the spirit, which is God’s Word to defeat the devil. This did not happen overnight, but baby step by baby step I walked out of the attack. Every day I became a little stronger and finally I looked back and I was out of the attack. I renewed my mind with God’s Word, and became victorious. I built my faith by quoting His Word. *So then, faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God” (Romans 10:17).*