

Coping with Anxiety in a Dangerous World

Just as the biblical writers faced many dangers in their time, we are now starkly faced with our own anxieties and fears. Are worry, anxiety and fear signs of lack of faith? Does God promise to protect us from all evil? How do we have our minds renewed in relation to these emotions? Does Scripture address panic attacks, phobias, OCD and PTSD? Are there psychological and medical therapies for anxiety that are helpful for both Christians and non-Christians? Is medication helpful? Can we call these “common grace remedies” gifts from God to a hurting world?

Richard Winter is Professor Emeritus of Counseling and Applied Theology at Covenant Seminary in St Louis, USA, and has served as one of the leaders of the European Counsellors Networks. He is also a psychotherapist and counsellor - who trained in medicine and psychiatry in England before – and was on staff and was director of the English branch of the L’Abri Fellowship for 14 years. He has served in a variety of pastoral and teaching leadership roles in the church. He is the author of *When Life Goes Dark: Finding Hope in the Midst of Depression* (IVP, 2012); *Perfecting Ourselves to Death: The Pursuit of Excellence and the Perils of Perfectionism* (IVP, 2005); *Still Bored in a Culture of Entertainment: Rediscovering Passion and Wonder* (IVP, 2002); and numerous professional journal articles. He is married, with four children and nine grandchildren.

- I. How do you experience anxiety?
 - A. Do you feel guilty for feeling anxiety, worry and fear? Is it a sin?
 - B. Healthy and unhealthy anxiety
 - C. Common struggles
 1. Overestimation of danger. Underestimation of resources and coping
 2. Worry regarding the future, rumination about the past – steals the present
 3. Living with uncertainty
 4. What we feed grows
 - D. Irrational fears
 1. Panic, phobias and OCD
 2. PTSD
- II. Some are more sensitive to anxiety

- A. Amygdala
- B. Genes, temperament, childhood and adult experiences

III. Biblical Wisdom – A Bird’s Eye View

A. Old Testament:

1. Genesis 1-3 The Fall: Disease, death and danger enter the world
2. 1 Kings 19:3 *Elijah was afraid and ran for his life... I have had enough Lord... Take my life...*
3. Proverbs 1:7 *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.*
 - a. Fear God and ... Don't be afraid!
4. Jeremiah 17:7-10 Tree beside the water. No worries, no fear!
5. David and other Psalmists
 - a. Psalm 55:4-8 *Fear and trembling... Oh that I had wings...*
 - b. Psalm 37 *Don't fret...trust...be still!*
 - c. Psalm 55:22-23 *Cast your burden on the Lord... I will trust...*
 - d. Psalm 46:1-2, 10 *God is our refuge... we will not fear... Be still and...*
 - e. What to do? Face it honestly. What likely cause? Faith and trust!
 - f. Psalm 91 What does God promise? *He will deliver you... you will not fear the terror... the pestilence... the destruction...*

B. New Testament

1. Jesus
 - a. Hebrews 5:7 *During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death...*
 - b. Matthew 6:19-34 *Don't worry!*
 - i. Competing treasures

- ii. A Father's care for birds, flowers and how much more for you!
 - iii. How much should we "care", "take thought", "be anxious"?
 - iv. Priorities? Anxiety reveals idols.
 - v. Faith, belief, trust... Who's in control?
2. Paul
- a. Philippians 4:4-9 *Do not be anxious about anything but...*
 - i. *Prayer and supplication*
 - ii. *Thanksgiving*
 - iii. Positive thinking
 - iv. Practice, Action and Trust
 - v. *Peace of God... God of peace*
 - b. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)
 - i. Activating event
 - ii. Belief
 - iii. Consequence
 - iv. Disputation
 - c. Gratitude
 - i. 1 Thessalonians 5:16 -18 *Give thanks in all circumstances*
 - ii. 1 Thessalonians 5:23. *May the God of peace sanctify you completely...*
 - d. Romans 12:2 *Don't conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.*
 - e. Romans 8:28, 35-38 Ultimate threat. Hebrews 11:32-40 Men and women of faith
 - f. Ephesians 6:10-20 Resist the devil.
 - i. *Armour of God*
 - ii. Ps 8:2 Praise silences the enemy

g. Galatians 6:2-5 *Carry each other's burdens...*

IV. Common Grace Wisdom for Anxiety

- A. Help make friends with anxiety – a signal to pay attention
- B. Help to approach anxiety and fear, and not avoid
- C. What can I control?
- D. Learning to live with uncertainty
- E. Learn to Breathe
- F. Progressive Muscle Relaxation
- G. Avoid CATS
- H. Exercise
- I. Diet
- J. Routine and predictability
- K. Art, music, acting, dancing, sport, yoga
- L. Safe relationships
- M. Box/pot/basket
- N. Identify linked emotions – anger and grief
- O. Work against repetitive thinking and catastrophizing
- P. Sleep
- Q. Don't isolate – maintain friendships/family
- R. Two positive thoughts/day
- S. Gratitude
- T. Prayer, sermons, and worship
- U. Medication

V. Specialist treatments for Panic, Phobias, OCD and PTSD. Much practical wisdom.

VI. Remember:

- A. *“Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the Lord your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you.”* Deuteronomy 31:6
- B. *“Casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you”* 1 Peter 5:7

Suggested Readings and Listening:

When Life Goes Dark: Finding Hope in the midst of Depression Chapter 8 on Anxiety, Richard Winter, IVP 2012

Running Scared: Fear, Worry and the God of Rest. Ed Welch, New Growth Press, 2007

Brain Block: Free Yourself from Obsessive Compulsive Behavior. Jeffrey Schwartz, MD

Tim Keller sermons/podcasts on anxiety: e.g. <https://podcast.gospelinlife.com/e/prayer-of-rest/> and <https://podcast.gospelinlife.com/e/prayer-for-security/>