

# The Christian and Contemporary Culture

## Session 1: Anxiety and Depression

**Today's teens are worse than ever**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ow0lr63y4Mw> "Stop it"

Discover

Builders (1920-1944) Major World Wars

Baby Boomers (1945-65) end of wars and prosperity

Gen X (65-84) cold war, rise of critical media

Millennials (85-00) end of cold war new era and debt-based prosperity

iGen (01-20?) digital age and war on terror

### What is it?

*Anxiety*

What it is: **worry**: the inability to stop thinking about something bad that hasn't happened or won't happen. **Fear**: often irrational fears, not typical fears like spiders but debilitating fears of circumstances or situations that interfere with the ability to accomplish everyday tasks. **Stress**: not like too much work, but physical stress sending the body into "overdrive" at times when it is not required.

Medically Speaking: the inner parts of the brain that control the "fight or flight" system send signals that the body is in danger when it is not. The limbic and central nervous systems become full of epinephrine which sends the body into a high adrenaline state at times in which there is no danger.

What it feels like: anxiety in general feels like an un-stoppable merry-go-round of worry and fear surrounding a particular event (usually in the future), a person's competence, past behavior, or other worries. An anxiety attack is symptomatically identical to a heart attack: shortness of breath, chest pain, trouble breathing, etc.

"John is 17, she is popular at school. He suffers from an unbearable amount of anxiety and stress. He worries about driving on the freeway, about saying something stupid in front of his peers, about embarrassing his parents, about failing in the classroom, and just about anything else that pops in his head. He sometimes gets stomachaches and headaches as a result of the worry and that makes him worry more. He simply can't relax."

*Depression*

What it is: depression is **not** being sad when something bad happens. It's being sad when everything good is happening. The opposite of depression is Vitality not happiness.

Medically Speaking: there are numerous kinds of depression. Reactive is the response to real, imagined or threatened loss. It carries on for months at a time and is typical in adolescence. Neurotic is a lifestyle response to stress and anxiety and is long-lasting often needing counseling and medication.

What it feels like: a black cloud that follows you everywhere you go that keeps you from enjoying life. It is a weight on your shoulders that keeps you from leaping out of a pit of despair.

“Cindy, 17, has a sad and pained face painted on, her eyes are lifeless, her hair limp and oily. As a child she loved school and church. Her depression seems to be the result of her inability to deal with herself and her external circumstances. She blames her x-boyfriend and believes if a boy asked her out everything would be better. However, she would still find another reason to be unhappy. For some reason she has made her feelings solely dependent upon people’s responses to her.”

*Other Mental Health Issues:*

OCD, personality disorders, eating disorders, Post-Traumatic Stress disorders, Dissociative disorders, Attention disorders like ADD, ADHD.

*We are focusing on Anxiety and Depression because they are far more common and because they are the most caused by external events and forces more than the others.*

### **What is Happening?**

I believe that media tends to know what we are thinking and feeling before we do. Why? Because they have tons of researchers who are getting a bead on what people are feeling in order to feed them media that meets them where they are.

Millennials: Superbad, American Pie: comedies about Party Life

Digitals: Hunger Games, Divergent: dramas about fighting for yourself

50% of all lifetime cases of mental health begin forming by age 14, 75% by 24.

1 in 4 children Anxiety, 1 in 5 experiencing depression before adulthood

56% more teens experienced a major depressive episode in 2015 than in 2010.

1 in 9 are suffering from DIAGNOSABLE MAJOR DEPRESSION. More likely among girls than boys.

46% more 15-19 yr olds committed suicide in 2015 than in 2007.

The percentage of students who said they are “very happy” has plummeted, while feelings of inadequacy and loneliness are at an all-time high.

If we look closely at data and surveys some of these numbers are not much worse than they were when their parents were kids (gen X) but the concern is the incredibly fast change and the realization that it might not bottom out: it continues to get worse.

Discern

### **Why is this happening?**

Some have blamed digital devices. But studies of individuals indicate that teens who spend more time on screens also tend to spend more time in person with their friends. But when we

look at the larger populace, more screen time is directly linked to less-in person social interaction and more loneliness. In other words, teens who are naturally gregarious and friendly use both in person interaction and digital interaction and can thrive on that.

What is happening is that in person time is being exchanged for digital time, so students who previously were not super social are becoming less social and spend more time on their digital devices thus creating an even greater gap as the social kids post things that they are doing together and the unsocial kids are left to watch and feel greater despair as they see events happening which they are not partaking in.

Others blame academic rigors, this is contributing but studies show that students who spend more time doing homework are less likely to be depressed. TV watching is linked but teens watch less TV. New media screen time is UP, print media consumption is down.

Independence in all the wrong areas: teens are given phones with access to the unfiltered internet but are given very little real responsibility. iGen is less likely to work, manage their own money, drive to school, manage their own schedules, resolve their own conflicts in school or with friends. Parents step in and fix their problems and do not give teens the space to figure out their own solutions. They are unprepared and as they are hitting adulthood all they want is to return to the good-ol-days.

Sleep is down: more than 40% of teens are getting 7 hours of sleep a night or less (they need 9). Teens who spend more time online sleep less. “the number of teens who don’t sleep enough goes up after two or more hours a day of electronic device use and skyrockets from there.” Teens who don’t get enough sleep are more than twice as likely to report higher levels of depressive symptoms.

### **What does the Bible say about it?**

People in the Bible deal with it and express it to God and one another:

Psalms 55:1-5

Psalms 88:3-7

Lamentations 3

When someone is in the middle of an anxiety attack is NEVER the time to bring up arguments against worry. When we are in our sensible minds we should be dwelling on the work of God and on his daily provision. When we encounter worry our minds should then be more ready to turn to the memory and thought of God’s goodness before we are overwhelmed by the fears that ensnare us. Fear is not a “bad” thing, it is a natural part of the way that God made humans, fear helps us to know when to protect ourselves but fear must be in the proper order. To cast our anxiety and fear on God is have proper fear—fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom... when we fear things before God our fears are poorly placed, when we fear God all other things pale in comparison to his greatness and help us to realize the futility of our worry.

People often think that the opposite of Depression is Happiness but it is not, it is Joy or Vitality. Joy and happiness are not synonymous. Joy is the ability to worship and give thanks in the face of adversity and pain. Happiness is a fleeting feeling of positivity when life is “good.” Think of James 1:2-3 “consider it pure joy, brothers and sisters, when you face trials of many kinds...” Jeremiah speaks so well of his depression in a book titled “Lamentations” or in a more modern translation “#SadDays.”

### **Biblical verses in response:**

Isaiah 41:10, Luke 12:27, Philippians 4:6-7, Romans 15:13

Decide

Self-Esteem	Self-Worth	Self-Acceptance
Performance/expectations	Image of God	In Christ
Comparison	Common Grace	Special Grace
temporal	eternal	Eternal
conditional	unconditional	unconditional
achievement	image bearer	gratitude
approval	glory of God	good works
IDOLATRY	SIGNIFICANCE	SECURITY

### **How NOT to help:**

Encourage Self-Esteem

Busyness of the body = busyness of the mind

“just go make friends”

Solve their conflicts for them (all the time)

### **How to Help**

Encourage self-worth and self-acceptance based on their identity in Christ (Ephesians 2:9-10)

Encourage and Model healthy friendships and face to face time: be willing to drive

Connect your student with adults who can give a listening ear

Listen, enter their pain with them, THEN remind them of their identity in Christ.