

6. Provide a biblical definition of anxiety and fear. Describe manifestations of anxiety and worry in both the inner and outer man. Explain the biblical factors that drive anxiety and fear. Detail several biblical strategies to respond to anxiety and fear.

Introduction: Some Definitions

- I. Fear, worry, and anxiety are uncomfortable emotions we all experience. When a person becomes anxious, a chemical reaction occurs where adrenalin pumps into the body triggering a fight or flight response. Someone who struggles with anxiety often feels as if someone just jumped out from behind a corner and scared them, but instead of the feeling subsiding it often increases and feeds on itself.
- II. The source of worry is not usually our body but our habitual thinking patterns. Our body is not broken; in fact, it most likely works very well—it pumps adrenaline in response to our thinking.
- III. The Bible makes a distinction between fear and anxiety/worry. Although each word conveys a similar idea, each has different nuances.
 - A. “Anxiety usually involves worrying about what could possibly happen. Fear goes a step further and is more convinced that what is dreaded will really happen.”¹
- IV. The Bible also makes a distinction between appropriate fear and concern and inappropriate (sinful) fear and worry.

Appropriate Fear and Concern in the Bible

- I. The Fear of the Lord is commended in the Bible.
 - A. The fear of the Lord is a deep respect filled with awe, knowing that God is both just and holy, yet loving and gracious through Jesus Christ. The Christian fears the Lord when he runs to Christ for righteousness and honors God’s holiness by reverentially living out a life of holiness.

Proverbs 18:10 *The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous man runs into it and is safe.*

Ecclesiastes 12:13–14 *The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.*

- II. The Bible also commends the wisdom of reasonable fear of real dangers.

Deuteronomy 22:8 *“When you build a new house, you shall make a parapet for your roof, that you may not bring the guilt of blood upon your house, if anyone should fall from it.*

“God has equipped us with a bodily response—an increase in adrenaline production—that can help us when physical danger is imminent...As long as we do not let our fear or our feelings keep us from doing what is right, and we turn to God in our fear, that fear is not ungodly.”²

¹ Stuart Scott, “Anger, Anxiety and Fear,” 13.

² Stuart Scott, “Anger, Anxiety and Fear,” 15.

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- III. The Bible also teaches that we should be mindful of the future, not to look ahead with worry but rather committing our plans to the Lord.

Psalm 90:12 *Teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.*

James 4:13–16 *Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit”—yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.” As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.*

Inappropriate (Sinful) Fear and Worry in the Bible

- I. Fear becomes sinful when we allow it to paralyze us and keep us from doing what is right.

Matthew 25:24–28 *He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, ‘Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.’ But his master answered him, ‘You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents.*

- A. Paralyzing fear brings our focus to self and self-protection rather than love for others and doing what is right. It also shows a lack of trust in God.
1. On the night Jesus’ was betrayed, he told his disciples not to be afraid (John 14:1, 27), yet they were. All the disciples deserted Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:43-50). Peter denied Jesus three times (Luke 22:54-62), and after Jesus was crucified, the disciples hid themselves behind locked doors (John 20:19-23). Why did they do this? They were thinking of themselves. They weren’t trusting in Jesus.

- II. Concern becomes sinful when we seek to control the future by worrying about it or taking sinful action.

- A. “Worry itself is *concern over the future*. Worry is concern about something that one *can do nothing about*, and that he *cannot even be sure about*...One who worries looks off into the future. But the future is not here yet. There is nothing to lay a hand on; there is nothing that can be done. The worrier cannot control it; he does not even know what it will look like. No one but God knows its true shape. First, he imagines that matters will be this way, then (he thinks), they might be that way. Because he cannot know, he allows it to tear him apart.”³

Common Causes of Worry and Fear

- I. Placing one’s hope in earthly things (money, possessions, mammon).
- A. An increase in mammon = an increase in anxiety.

³ Jay Adams, “What to Do When You Worry All the Time?” paragraph 7.

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Matthew 6:19–21 *“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

Matthew 6:25 *“Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?”*

II. Fear of Man: doing things for the praise of people

Matthew 6:1 *“Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.*

III. Lack of faith

- A. Instead of trusting in God’s goodness, care, and sovereignty, we seek to control our lives, but this only increases our anxiety.

Matthew 6:30 *But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?*

The Futility of Anxiety

- A. Anxiety cannot change anything, and it is a waste of time.

Matthew 6:27 *And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?*

- B. Anxiety weighs you down and stresses you out.

Proverbs 12:25 *Anxiety in a man’s heart weighs him down, but a good word makes him glad.*

- C. Being anxious about money does not produce more money in your bank account.

Proverbs 23:4–5 *Do not toil to acquire wealth; be discerning enough to desist. When your eyes light on it, it is gone, for suddenly it sprouts wings, flying like an eagle toward heaven.*

- D. The anxious person worries about things that do not ultimately matter, things that will be meaningless and less than worthless in the next life.

1 John 2:15–17 *Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.*

- E. Anxiety steals your devotion away from God.

Matthew 6:24 *“No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.*

Overcoming Fear, Worry and Anxiety

- I. Call fear and worry what it is. Do not accept the normalizing of anxiety.
 - A. Anxiety is a feeling caused by a preoccupation or devotion to earthly things (money, possessions, people, life itself, etc.) that distracts a person from loving God and others. It is the act of putting one's trust/hope in earthly things and is, therefore, by definition a lack of faith, a false worship, and a sin.
 - B. Yet, realize that not all fear is bad. Fear and worry become sinful when they distract or hinder us from loving God and others.

- II. Confess and repent of your anxious thoughts and the sinful behaviors that have resulted.

1 John 1:9 *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

- A. Calling fear and worry a sin is freeing because we have the promise that Jesus will free us from our sins.

Romans 6:4 *We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.*

- III. Do what is reasonable to alleviate the situation causing anxiety and intentionally give the rest to God in prayer.

Philippians 4:5-7 *Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

- A. "Anxiety wrings its hands; faith folds its hands. Anxiety paces the floor; faith kneels on the floor. Prayer is an exercise of faith, not a display of anxiety."⁴

- IV. Determine the next right and loving thing to do *today* and do it no matter how fearful or anxiety producing it might be.

Matthew 6:33-34 *But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.*

1 Peter 3:6 *Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are her children, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening.*

1 John 4:18 *There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear.*

- A. "If you have laid your best plans in the Lord's hands, you can turn your attention away from tomorrow. You need no longer be concerned about that, but your concern, your efforts, your energies, all that you have now can be poured into *today*. That is the key that locks the door on worry and opens the door to peace: *focus your concern upon today*."⁵

⁴ Charles Quarles, Sermon on the Mount, 207.

⁵ Jay Adams, "What to Do When You Worry All the Time?" paragraph 15.

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Matthew 6:34 *Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.*

- V. Summary of Steps:
- A. Call worry/anxiety/fear what it is—sin.
 - B. Confess it to God who forgives and gives grace to overcome.
 - C. Do what is reasonable and pray.
 - D. Do the next right thing no matter how you feel.

Suggested Reading

- I. **Stuart Scott, Anger, Anxiety, & Fear.**
- II. **Elyse Fitzpatrick, Overcoming Fear, Worry, and Anxiety.**
- III. **David Powlison, Overcoming Anxiety: Relief for Worried People.**