

A Good Word Makes It Glad¹

Text: Proverbs 12:25 ²⁵ Anxiety in the heart of man causes depression, but a good word makes it glad. (NKJV)

Introduction: The Bible ties in together two terrible mysteries: anxiety and depression. Many times, we are afraid to look into them. Many people deal with serious depression and anxiety. Indeed, in both the United States and Great Britain, and certainly across the world, anxiety and depression are on the rise.

The Bible has a lot to say about anxiety, but the word itself may not be found all that often. In the English Standard Version, it is used 8 times. In the New International Version, it is found 7 times. The King James Version does not use the word at all. Synonyms like *trouble*, *heaviness*, *distress*, and *cares* are used in its place.

Some Bible Examples of Anxiety and Depression

The specific causes of anxiety are probably more than can be named, but a few examples from the Bible point to some general causes. In Genesis 32, Jacob is returning home after many years away. One of the reasons he had left home was to escape the anger of his brother, Esau, from whom Jacob had stolen the birthright and blessing from their father. Now, as Jacob nears his homeland, he hears that Esau is coming to meet him with 400 men. Jacob is immediately anxious, expecting a horrible battle with his brother. In this case, the anxiety is caused by a broken relationship and a guilty conscience.

In 1 Samuel 1, Hannah is distressed because she was unable to conceive children and she was being taunted by Peninnah, her husband’s other wife. Her distress is caused by unfulfilled desires and the harassment of a rival.

In Esther 4, the Jewish people are anxious because of a royal decree allowing them to be massacred. Queen Esther is anxious because she was planning to risk her life on behalf of her people. Fear of death and the unknown is a key element of anxiety.

Not all anxiety is sinful. In 1 Corinthians 7:32, Paul states that an unmarried man is “anxious” about pleasing the Lord, while a married man is “anxious” about pleasing his wife (ESV). In this case, the anxiety isn’t a sinful fear but a deep, proper concern.

¹ Hari, Johann: YouTube: This Could Be Why You’re Depressed or Anxious

Probably the best-known passage on anxiety comes from the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 6. Our Lord warns us against being anxious about the various cares of this life. For the child of God, even necessities like food and clothing are nothing to worry about. Using examples from God's creation, Jesus teaches that our Heavenly Father knows our needs and cares about them. If God takes care of simple things like grass, flowers, and birds, won't He also care for people who are created in His image? Rather than worry over things we cannot control, we should "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things [the necessities of life] will be added to you" (verse 33). Putting God first is a cure for anxiety.

Many times, anxiety or concern is a result of sin, and the cure is to deal with the sin. Psalm 32:1-5 says that the person whose sin is forgiven is blessed, and the heavy weight of guilt is taken away when sins are confessed.

- Is a broken relationship creating anxiety? Try to make peace (2 Corinthians 13:11).
- Is fear of the unknown leading to anxiety? Turn the situation over to the God who knows everything and is in control of it all (Psalm 68:20).
- Are overwhelming circumstances causing anxiety? Have faith in God. When the disciples became distressed in a storm, Jesus first rebuked their lack of faith, then rebuked the wind and the waves (Matthew 8:23-27). As long as we are with Jesus, there is nothing to fear.

We can count on the Lord to provide for our needs, protect us from evil, guide us, and keep our souls from all harm and destruction. We may not be able to prevent anxious thoughts from entering our minds, but we can practice the right response. Philippians 4:6, 7 instructs us to "not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."²

² gotquestions.org: "What Does The Bible Say About Anxiety?"

Medicine for Anxiety and Depression

Often, Doctors will say: we know why people get like this. Some people just naturally get a chemical imbalance in their heads. You're clearly one of them. All we need to do is give you some drugs that will get your chemical balance back to normal. Often the medication helps, but then the anxiety and depression start to come back. The Doctor then increases the amount of the medication until the patient reaches the limit that the patient can safely take; then, after a time, if things don't improve, perhaps another medication will be prescribed to replace or supplement the first one. This can become an endless and exhausting cycle for the patient.

Panic attacks, anxiety disorders, phobias, and depression affect millions of people. Although medical experts believe that many times the aforementioned ailments originate within a person's psyche, there are times when a chemical imbalance is the cause. If this is the case, medication is often prescribed to help counter the imbalance, which in turn treats the symptoms of the psychological ailment. Is this a sin? No. God has allowed man to grow in his knowledge of medicine, which God often uses in the healing process. Does God need man-made medicine in order to heal? Of course not! But God has chosen to allow the practice of medicine to progress, and there is no biblical reason not to avail ourselves of it.

Keep in mind: [It would seem there are some people whose bodies require long-term usage of anti-depressants in order to keep symptoms at bay. Also, certain other psychological disorders, such as bipolar disorder and schizophrenia, require long-term pharmaceutical usage, much like insulin for diabetes.]

However, there is a fine line between using medicine for healing purposes and continual reliance upon medicine for daily living. We need to recognize God as the Great Physician, and know that He alone holds the power to truly heal (John 4:14). We need to look to God first and foremost for our healing. For example, medicine used to treat a case of panic attack should be used to the extent that it allows the sufferer to deal with the root cause of fear. It should be used to give back control to the sufferer. However, many sufferers take medicine in order to avoid dealing with the true cause of their ailment; this would be denying responsibility, denying God's healing, and possibly denying others the freedom of forgiveness or closure to some past event that could be contributing to the ailment.

It is a wonderful thing to use the Word of God and wise counsel to enact transformation in one's heart and mind that can often lead to the time when the need for medicine would diminish.

The believer's position in Christ is strengthened when we realize that God brings healing into those troubled areas of the heart and mind which are causing the ailment of anxiety and depression. For instance, when dealing with anxiety, we can look to what God's Word has to say about fear and its place in a believer's life. Reading through the following Scriptures and meditating on them can be a cure, as they give confidence and illuminate the truth of what being a child of God entails: Proverbs 29:25; Matthew 6:34; John 8:32; Romans 8:28–39; 12:1–2; 1 Corinthians 10:13; 2 Corinthians 10:5; Philippians 4:4–9; Colossians 3:1–2; 2 Timothy 1:6–8; Hebrews 13:5–6; James 1:2–4; 1 Peter 5:7; 2 Peter 1:3–4; 1 John 1:9; 4:18–19.

God can heal supernaturally and miraculously. We should pray to that end. God also heals through medicine and doctors. We should pray to that end, as well. Regardless of which direction God takes, our ultimate trust must be in Him alone (Matthew 9:22).³

We are not advocating against medication. It certainly has its rightful place and use. However, for the believer, some other things should also be considered on a spiritual basis.

Look To The Lord For Every Need

Why is it that with the passing of each year more and more of us are finding it harder to get through the day? Many people can't control anxiety and depression, and don't understand why it is happening. Many are quite ashamed of it. This is a mystery to us, but with God nothing is a mystery. He is able to pull back the curtain and show us how to deal this great issue.

Getting At The Issues Causing Anxiety and Depression

You are doing everything you're told to do by the story that's dominating the culture. Why do you still feel like this? But most of the factors that have been proven to cause depression and anxiety are not in our biology. They're factors in the way we live. And once you understand them, opens up a very different set of solutions that should be offered to people alongside the option of chemical antidepressants.

For example:

- if you're lonely, you're more likely to become depressed.
- If when you go to work, you don't have any control over your job, you can experience anxiety and depression. You've got to do what you're told and you can't find a way forward - you're more likely to become depressed.

³ gotquestions.org: "Should A Christian Take Anti-Depressants Or Other Mental Health Medicines?"

- If you very rarely get out into the natural world, you're more likely to become depressed
- AND: One there is one thing that unites the causes of anxiety and depression in many cases: Everyone here knows you've all got natural physical needs, right? Obviously, you need food, you need water, you need shelter, you need clean air. If I took those things away from you, you'd all be in real trouble real fast.

But at the same time, every human being has natural psychological needs. You need to feel you belong. You need to feel your life has meaning and purpose. You need to let people see you and value you. You've got to know that you have a future that makes sense.

This culture we built is good at lots of things. But we've been getting less and less good at meeting these deep, underlying psychological needs. We've built a culture in our world that separates people, boxes them in, and treats them like machines and as if they don't count and are expendable. We've got a big problem with the way we are living.

A. A Lesson From The Third World

Johann Hari wrote a book entitled: "Lost Connections". In it, he describes how the third world often handles people dealing with anxiety and depression. Surprisingly, what Hari learned has been in the Bible all along. In many places around the world when someone is down with physical ailments, anxiety or depression, the community doesn't think of them as weak or crazy; they work hard at understanding why someone is suffering. They do this by coming along side: they don't say: Hey, buddy, you need to pull yourself together. It's your job to figure out how to fix this problem on your own. On the contrary, what they say is, we're here as a group to pull together with you. So together, we can figure out and fix this problem.

1. This is what every depressed person needs, and it's what every depressed person deserves. This is why one of the leading doctors at the United Nations in their official statement for World Health a couple of years back in 2017 said we need to talk less about chemical imbalances and more about the imbalances in the way we live.
2. Drugs give real relief to some people; but it is precisely because our problems go deeper than our biology that we deep a deeper spiritual solution.

I. I want to focus on two of the causes and two of the solutions that stand out in prayerfully helping people deal with anxiety and depression.

A. **First: Get Connected: We are the loneliest society in human history.** There was a recent study that asked Americans: Do you feel like you're no longer close to anyone? And 39% of people said that certainly described them - no longer close to anyone.

Professor John Cassio, a noted professor in the field of Social Neuroscience poses one great question for us: Why do we exist? Why are we here? Why are we alive?

1. It turns out that we are (and the Bible bears this out): made to live together with a faith binds our lives, our souls, our bodies. We have made a world that separates us and isolates us. But it doesn't have to be this way.
2. God created us to be a family. We are created to care about each other. If one doesn't show up, the others go looking for them and find how if others are okay, and figure out what was troubling them that day.
 - a. People say: you just need to be you. Be yourself. What we should say to people is don't be yourself, be us, this is the way to defeat some of the greatest causes of anxiety and depression is to be part of a group. The solution to these problems is stop drawing more and more on your resources as an isolated individual, and draw upon the resources of the family of God.
 - b. Ignoring this is what got us into this crisis to begin with. It relies on reconnecting with something bigger than you. And that really connects to one of the other causes of depression and anxiety that I wanted to talk to you about.

B. **Second: Kick Out The Junk Values:** Think about it: Junk Food has taken over our diets and made us physically sick. I don't say that with any sense of superiority. I still like McDonalds, Potato Chips, Chocolate Cake, and Ice Cream: but, if this all we ever eat, we are going to be sick.

1. A kind of junk values have taken over our minds and made us mentally sick. For 1000s of years, philosophers have said if you think life is about money, and status and showing off you're going to feel ultimately worthless, right?

2. Tim Kassar who is at Knox College in Illinois has been researching this for about 30 years now. And his research suggests several really important things.

1. First, the more you believe you can buy and display your way out of sadness and into a good life, the more likely you are to become depressed and anxious.
2. Secondly, stop believing the lie: you are not God, you are not in control. God is in control. The devil says: eat the apple, and you will be happy: lie!

We've been trained to look for happiness in all the wrong places. And just like junk food doesn't meet your nutritional needs and actually makes you feel terrible - Junk values don't meet your spiritual needs, and they take you away from a good life of peace and connectedness.

At some level, we all know these things. But in this culture, we don't live by them. We know them so well. They become cliches, but we don't live by them. Why would we know something so profound, but not live by it?

It may be hard to see what is really going on when we are in such pain. But we must start when God starts us: relying on Him for everything in the company of others who are travelling with us and looking to the Lord.

Conclusion: Some people need medication; but everybody needs the medicine of the soul, and the company of believers in overcoming anxiety and depression. Our creation is in Christ, we are created for a purpose; we are unique, one of a kind. We are not alone, we are in (as Eldon Trueblood said) the "Company of the Committed". Our strength is in the Lord, and we often find the strength of the Lord in the gathered fellowship of the believers.

We Can Pray: I need prayer for anxiety.⁴

When I'm being squeezed by the vice grip of anxiety, it's really hard for me to pray. My brain is going in 10,000 different directions and I often don't even know what to pray.

Can you relate?

Here's the good news though. God always *hears* our prayers for anxiety. He longs to help us when we're anxious. He wants to meet us right where we are and give us the peace that passes understanding.

As Paul said in Philippians 4:6, "do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God."

So what sorts of prayers for anxiety should we pray? Here are five.

Prayer for Anxiety #1: Trusting God's Good Character

Father, I don't understand why you're allowing me to go through these challenging circumstances. I don't know why you've allowed me to be pressed on every side and **overwhelmed by the waves of life**.

But what I do know is that you are good and loving and faithful. I know that nothing can get to me without first going through you. And I know that you are working all things together for my good and your glory.

As it says in Romans 8:28, "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose."

So even though I may not understand *why* I'm experiencing these **difficult trials**, I know that you are walking with me every step of the way. So I lift this prayer for anxiety to you. I trust in you to sustain me even when I can't sustain myself. You are faithful even when I am faithless.

⁴ Stephen Altrogge: Church Leaders Magazine: March 20, 2019: "Prayer for Anxiety: When You're Overwhelmed"

Prayer for Anxiety #2: Trusting God's Good Promises

Father, even though I may not be able to see how any good can come out of these circumstances, you have promised to *never* stop doing good to me.

As you say in Psalm 23:6, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

In Psalm 84:11 you say, "No good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly."

As I lift this prayer for anxiety, I believe this promise. I believe that you will not withhold a single good thing from me. If something is good for me, you'll give it to me. If it's not, you'll withhold it.

I believe that right now your **goodness and mercy** are *pursuing me*. Even though I may feel anxious, I can't escape your goodness and mercy. You are pouring out blessings on me right now, and nothing can stop your good promises from being fulfilled. Even though I'm currently feeling anxious, I'm choosing to put my trust in your word over my feelings. I'm choosing to believe your promises rather than what my eyes can see.

Prayer for Anxiety #3: Trusting God's Good Provision

Lord, in Philippians 4:19 you say, "And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus."

I thank you that you are going to meet my every need. I may not be able to see how you're going to meet my every need, but I'm choosing to believe your promise. I thank you that you are going to supply my needs out of your bounteous riches in Christ. I don't have to twist your arm in order to get you to meet my needs. Just as I love to provide for my children, you absolutely love to provide abundantly for your children. So I'm asking you to provide for me, confident that you will. Confident that you will do great things in response to my prayers.

As I lift this prayer for anxiety, I remember the words of Charles Spurgeon, who said:

*IT DOES NOT MATTER HOW HEAVY TROUBLES ARE IF YOU CAN CAST THEM
ON THE LORD. THE HEAVIER THEY ARE, SO MUCH THE BETTER, FOR THE
MORE YOU HAVE GOTTEN RID OF, AND THE MORE THERE IS LAID ON THE
ROCK.*

Father, I'm casting all my cares on you because I know you care for me.

Prayer for Anxiety #4: Trusting God's Fatherly Care

Lord, your word tells me that you care for me as a Father cares for his children. I am your child and I thank you that you love me with a deep, overwhelming, never ceasing, overpowering love.

As you say in Matthew 7:11, "If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!"

Father, even I know how to give good gifts to children, and I'm a sinful human. You are perfectly good and loving, and I thank you that you will give me good, sweet gifts. I thank you that your heart beats with Fatherly affection for me. I thank you that nothing can separate me from your intense, Fatherly love.

As it says in Romans 8:35, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?" Because nothing can separate me from your love, I can trust you completely. I can throw all my weight on you. I can hope in you fully. I offer this prayer for anxiety, knowing that you are my good, gracious, **heavenly Father**.

Prayer for Anxiety #5: Trusting God to Carry Every Burden

Lord, in 1 Peter 5:6-7 you say, "**Humble yourselves**, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you."

Father, I humbly offer this prayer for anxiety up to you, casting all my anxieties upon you. The simple truth is that I am not able to carry all these burdens on my own. I don't have the strength or the wisdom to successfully navigate these challenging circumstances.

And so I am casting every burden, big and small upon you. I am clinging to you in the midst of the storm, holding fast to you. Though I may not be able to carry all my burdens, you absolutely can.

Oh What Needless Pain We Bear

If you're struggling with anxiety, run to God constantly in prayer. Don't let anxiety dominate your life. Don't let worry rule you. Take all your worries and fears and struggles to God and lay them at his feet.

I can't help but be reminded of the hymn, "What a Friend We Have in Jesus":

*WHAT A PRIVILEGE TO CARRY EVERYTHING TO GOD IN PRAYER!
O WHAT PEACE WE OFTEN FORFEIT, O WHAT NEEDLESS PAIN WE BEAR,
ALL BECAUSE WE DO NOT CARRY EVERYTHING TO GOD IN PRAYER!*

Don't forfeit your peace or bear needless pain. Lift up your prayer for anxiety to God and let him bear your burdens.