

Looking at Anxiety

What is anxiety?

Anxiety can be a normal healthy reaction. Your body naturally responds to stress. Potential harm or difficulty triggers your body to respond (rush of adrenalin/increased blood pressure) and ignites fight or flight. “Do I stand up to the difficulty or do I assess its too much and move away?” As you learn to use anxiety well it aids in feelings of competence.

Bad anxiety vs. Good anxiety - the major difference is that bad anxiety lingers and regularly impairs daily functioning whereas good anxiety comes and goes and aids in daily functioning.

Good anxiety

- Acts as a warning sign: For instance, you may have anxiety about a relational issue that helps you to deal with the issue and the anxiety goes away (it doesn't persist). You may have had some sleepless nights and then you go back to normal sleeping.
- Provides motivation: Research has shown that students and athletes who experienced some anxiety displayed improved performance on tests or while participating in competitive sports.
- Helps with empathy: Anxiety can enhance self-awareness and other centered awareness and aid in empathy.
- Helps with leadership: Anxiety can attune you to situations and others that helps you think and act on behalf of others.

Bad anxiety

Experiencing consistent fear and worry, manifesting itself in apprehension to make decisions, often producing physical symptoms and meaningfully interfering with daily living.

- Occurs more days than not about numerous events or activities
- Difficulty disarming the anxiety
- Anxiety associated with 3 or more of the following six symptoms (With at least some symptoms having been presents for more days than not for the past 6 months)
 - a. Restlessness or feeling keyed up or on edge.
 - b. Being easily fatigued.
 - c. Difficulty concentrating or mind going blank.
 - d. Irritability.
 - e. Muscle tension.
 - f. Sleep disturbance (difficulty falling or staying asleep, or restless, unsatisfying sleep)

Biblical References on Anxiety

- “An anxious heart weighs a man down, but a kind word cheers him up” (Proverbs 12:25).
- “I sought the LORD, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears” (Psalm 34:4).
- “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6-7).
- “Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you” (1 Peter 5:6-7)
- If that’s how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and thrown into the furnace tomorrow, won’t he do much more for you—you of little faith? So don’t worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you. Therefore don’t worry about tomorrow, because tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. (Also see Matthew 6:30-34)

Our basic fear that prompts anxiety is separation from God. Being reconciled to God helps us move from debilitating fear to redemptive fear where we don’t feel alone in stress or worry, and it connects us to the Lord, so we stand better and move through stressful situations.

- Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. So the Lord God called out to the man and said to him, “Where are you?” And he said, “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid.” (Genesis 3:8-10)
- God is love, and the one who remains in love remains in God, and God remains in him. In this, love is made complete with us so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment, because as he is, so also are we in this world. There is no fear in love; instead, perfect love drives out fear, because fear involves punishment. So the one who fears is not complete in love. We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, “I love God,” and yet hates his brother or sister, he is a liar. For the person who does not love his brother or sister whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And we have this command from him: The one who loves God must also love his brother and sister. (1 John 4:16-21)

Closeness to God reinforces competence, connectedness and autonomy whereas aloneness exacerbates debilitating fear as it increases the mocking of rejection or incompetence.

All evidence points to there having been, in the earliest religious thought, a vision of the cosmos that was profoundly cyclical. The Jews were the first people to break out of this circle, to find a new way of thinking and experiencing, a new way of understanding and feeling the world, so much so that it may be said with some justice that theirs is the only new idea that human beings have ever had. (p. 5)

Though the heavens continue to be mined for metaphor, they are no longer predictive of anything. It is only the god who can predict; the heavens are reduced to serving him as an illustration. This is just fine with Avram: the narrator brings the incident to a close by remarking that Avram – the canny, worldly-wise chieftain that we now know him to be – “trusted in” this god and that the god deemed his trust “as righteous-merit on his part.” For this trust we are given no reason other than Avram’s insight: this self-reliant man relies on his own judgement to interpret correctly what is going on. Out of an age of tall tales of warriors and kings, all so like one another that they are hard to tell apart, comes this story of a skeptical, worldly patriarch’s trust in a disembodied voice. This is becoming, however, incredibly, the story of an interpersonal relationship (p. 70).

Quotes from *The Gift of the Jews: How a Tribe of Desert Nomads Changed the Way Everyone Thinks and Feels* by Thomas Cahill

Case Study: Michael Jones is a 38-year male who is married (wife – Anne who is 36 and they have been married 8 years) and has 3 children (Sam 6, Jake 4, and Drew 2). Michael is a project Manager with a large construction company in town. Michael and Anne met at Auburn where Michael majored in Building Science and Anne majored in interior design. Michael came from a nominally Christian family and wandered his first two years of Auburn living somewhat carelessly which pushed him toward RUF his Junior and Senior Years. His dad is a functional alcoholic and Michael got scared he was headed down that path. He was raised with enough taste of faith that he wanted to pursue more. He grew in his commitment to the Lord through RUF whereas Anne started right in at RUF from the beginning. Michael was 2nd born, a more kinesthetic learner and feels like he is thriving (at what he is doing) for the first time in his life. His parents continue to have an unstable relationship (his older brother struggles with substance abuse) and there is not much peace when it comes to his family. Anne’s family has a good measure of harmony – it is not perfect – but they navigate through difficulty toward togetherness. Anne was the first born and she has 3 younger sisters. Her family can talk about the past with good honesty where they can grieve some things done wrong and celebrate good things. Driving home after a difficult day at work he didn’t want to go home and felt what he thought was maybe a panic attack (sweating, shortness of breath, a twinge of dizziness).

Possible Issues contributing to anxiety

- Relatively new dad, new husband and wife new mom
- reminders of his family vs. Anne's family
- disappointing Anne
- Ongoing chaos with his father and family
- 2nd Born – feels his way places (how he learns)
- Thriving at what he is doing – does he choose work or family – how will Anne respond
- Work fears – thorns and thistles with work and relationships
- Has a glass of beer or two – what does this prompt
- Anne's family of origin feminine his masculine

How do we help Michael?

Body – exercise, diet, medication

Inner person – mind, will (longing/choosing), emotions, flesh and spirit

What will help Michael relationally – go back to versus above

The basic problem is that non-Christian counseling theories tend to take hold of one facet or one real problem area of human nature and turn it into the ultimate issue. Because they lack the comprehensive Christian worldview, which understands the problem of sin as infecting everything and understands the gift of grace as restoring everything, they fall into dualism. Tim Keller in *Four Models of Counseling in Pastoral Ministry*

Questions for Reflection

Do I largely have good anxiety or bad anxiety?

If good anxiety, where has it helped me to move through challenges? Has it helped me with empathy? Can I celebrate more that I am using anxiety well?

If I think anxiety is beginning to negatively impact my daily function how is it doing that? What symptoms am I experiencing and how frequently do they occur? Have I brought others in on this issue? Is there someone I can talk to about it? In what ways can I begin to seek to move toward a healthier use of anxiety?

Have I brought my anxiety to the Lord? Do I pray my fears? Do I thrust my fears on the Lord or pour them out? (Psalms can be an example of this)

How well am I taking care of my body? Could I get outside more, get my heart rate up more? Are there ways I could cooperate with God's love toward me by taking better care of myself physically?

Where are relationships hurting or helping with my fears? Do I have peace with the Lord, or do I have a hard time accepting his grace? (Am I being perfected out of fear?)

In what ways can I take steps with my relationships (friends, family, the Lord) that would help with anxiety?