

2 Times When Anxiety May Be Useful

Anxiety is uncomfortable. You're keyed up inside. You wonder if you can trust your thinking. And your body may experience any number of miserable symptoms. But anxiety may be useful.

There are times when anxiety signifies a medical condition, or it may be a response to something in your past or your present that is beyond your ability to manage. When that happens, dealing with the physical, emotional and spiritual factors involved can lead to real freedom.

While anxiety always feels unpleasant, it is not always only negative. Sometimes anxiety can be very useful. If you understand that, you can extract the significant value anxiety may provide on the way to a better future.

Here are two times when anxiety can be very valuable:

1. Anxiety provides necessary emotional fuel for change. What you're doing now may be killing you—literally or figuratively. You may even be miserable, exhausted and in significant pain. But you're actually quite comfortable. Your misery is what you know. You're used to the food you usually eat, the thoughts you usually think, the schedule you usually keep, the things you usually say to those around you, the things you ignore and put up with. In important ways, your sickness or addiction or dysfunction or pain has become normal for you.

To make a significant and lasting change, you will have to get even more uncomfortable.

Research showed that among a group of people who experienced significant and lasting change as a result of some form of therapy, fully 75 percent of those interviewed said a willingness to experience some anxiety along the way was a

critically important part of their success.

Change, real change, is hard. Your brain may scream about the process. You won't know what to do with yourself at times. You won't know how to do the thing you're trying to do in place of the old thing that was destroying your peace, life or relationship. The new way feels foreign.

The best athletes, creatives, business people and others who achieve extraordinary results have learned to embrace anxiety to push themselves to maximum performance. They even manufacture artificial anxiety in the form of deadlines, competitions and almost unreasonable goals. Yes, there's such a thing as too much anxiety. But don't make the mistake of believing success should ever be easy. Anything worthwhile will likely involve significant discomfort—including anxiety.

Embracing anxiety when your life needs to improve may well make the difference between success and failure. Think of it as providing the emotional fuel necessary to grow, change or otherwise reach the next level of what you desire and what God desires for you.

2. Divine discontent may feel like anxiety. God's purpose for you is not your comfort. He values you too much for that to be His goal. Freedom from all responsibility or challenge would end up being boring, and you would certainly not be doing your best. Our life in eternity will be full of responsibility and challenge (Luke 19:15-19).

Down here on Earth, that often feels like anxiety. Where you will spend eternity is based on your faith in Jesus, nothing else. But if you want to bear much fruit for God's kingdom here, do damage to the kingdom of darkness and maximize your impact and fulfillment, you will need to be stretched.

If you've given God permission to do what He wants with you, He will regularly stir things up if you become too comfortable. It's not that He desires your pain; He desires

your growth. Things that used to work don't seem to work any longer. What satisfied you doesn't satisfy any longer. There's a restlessness in your spirit that won't stop.

It's possible to see any discomfort as God moving us somewhere else. That's not necessarily so. Sometimes we need to learn contentment in our present circumstances, to persevere even when it seems things aren't progressing. But even in those times, God wants to use the challenges to stretch your character so you can be prepared for the next mission He has for you.

How Do You Know?

If you're feeling anxious, unsettled, unsure, how can you know what to do? Here are a few questions to quickly ask yourself or a trusted Christian friend that may help you know the next step:

- Are you holding back on making a lifestyle change you know is needed?
- Is there something the Holy Spirit is trying to change in your character?
- Have you become comfortable with some type of dysfunction in your relationships?
- Have you become comfortable with a limited measure of success?
- Do you sense the Holy Spirit is trying to stretch you in a new way?
- Are your gifts and resources being invested in the best way possible for God's kingdom?

If anxiety is paralyzing you, get some help.

But if anxiety is stretching you to make a necessary lifestyle change or to step into the next phase of what God has for you to do, embrace it. Learn from it. Use it as emotional fuel to move forward.

Question: Is there anything about your anxiety that you can embrace and harness to move forward? Please leave a comment below. {eo}

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