

When Anxiety Attacks, Here's How Spirit-Led Christians Should Respond

Many Christians believe once a woman surrenders her heart and life to God, she should be free from nervous-system disorders such as depression and anxiety. I know that God can do anything—including setting us free of all diseases. The disparity develops between what God can do and what we allow Him to do in our lives and bodies.

Anxiety is often misunderstood. It usually presents as a feeling of impending doom. It may be situational—during the illness of a loved one or other troubling circumstance. It may be more generalized and cannot be hooked to a specific event. This second type of anxiety is free floating and occurs without cause or understanding, lighting on your shoulder like a butterfly without invitation or warning. It ranges from mild to nearly debilitating.

Many Spirit-led anxiety sufferers feel like less-than Christians due to unfortunate comments spoken from the pulpit or overheard from the congregation. I've never met anyone with anxiety who wouldn't love to "pull herself up by her boot straps." But anxiety can be severe enough to prevent a victim from finding her boots.

Anxiety is a medical condition originating in the brain and nervous system. These systems are composed of neurons containing neurotransmitters, such as dopamine, norepinephrine, gaba and serotonin. We have these neurotransmitters whether saved by grace or not. Any change in the normal sequence of the firing (the release of the neurotransmitters) of neurons will cause a change in mood and behavior. An increased productivity of serotonin will likely

cause anxiety.

There is no measurable difference between a nervous-system disorder and a physiological condition such as heart disease or diabetes. I've never known a heart-attack victim who loves God being looked upon by Christians as a lesser believer. In almost all cases, Christians judging other Christians for anxiety stems from a lack of education or knowledge of any condition different than a malady in their lives. It is easy for a person who has never know anxiety to look upon it as sin. It isn't sin. It's a heartbreaking, hard to deal-with condition that affects all population sectors.

Earlier in my life, I had never known anxiety. However, in 1982, my husband, who was also the pastor of our church, left me for another woman. I found myself devastated emotionally, physically and spiritually, with three young children to raise and provide for. Eventually, child support was arranged.

Have you ever tried to support three children on child support paid by a man of modest wages? I experienced near-debilitating anxiety. My weight dropped from 135 pounds to 102. The anxiety kept me housebound for months. I feared running into anyone who would ask questions I had no answer to. I didn't know why he left me or the church. You cannot explain things you don't understand.

Eventually, I found a wonderful Christian counselor. She saw the wisdom of prescribing a short-term anti-anxiety medication. With her counsel, I didn't take it very long. But at the time, having slipped into a dark pit, it presented as a lifesaver.

After seeking this therapist for several months, I began my college career, knowing from day one that I would end up in her profession. I desired to help other women as she had so graciously helped me. Years later, I opened my own clinic.

Through the darkest hours, I counted on Scripture. Philippians

4:5-6 became my go-to verse: " Let everyone come to know your gentleness. The Lord is at hand. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and supplication with gratitude, make your requests known to God."

Ladies, when you find yourself in a circumstance you never could imagine, rest in God. See a Christian counselor. Hold your head up. And when necessary, seek medical help. {eoa}

Merilyn Howton Marriott, M.A., LPC-S is a psychotherapist and the author of *The Children of Main Street*.