

Breaking Free from the Stronghold of Anxiety

Have you ever had issues with anxiety, worry, or dealing with stress? Jason Cusick, author of *The Anxiety Field Guide* wrestled with anxiety his entire life but never really knew it.

His mother was a self-professed clean freak and people pleaser, and he inherited those traits. He hit an anxiety crisis several years ago when he became a lead pastor at his church. He spiraled down with uncontrollable anxious thoughts and feelings, as well as physical symptoms. He connected with a Christian therapist and began to heal.

Jason went into counseling and ended up taking note and writing ideas that were helpful to him. When he'd get anxious, he'd go back to those different notes and work through the issue. That gave him the idea to write his book to help others who may be experiencing anxiety. *The Anxiety Field Guide* is laid out with short, simple principles to apply to your situation.

Anxiety is a bad word for many, but if you look at what's happening in your body and mind with anxiety, you'll see that it's actually part of God's plan. Psalm 139 says we're fearfully and wonderfully made (complex), and anxiety is a response to a perceived threat.

For example, if you're alone and outside at night and hear a rumbling in the bushes, God's designed your body to respond immediately—your eyes dilate in order to allow more light, blood rushes to your appendages to allow you to fight or run, and adrenalin comes out of your adrenal glands to invigorate you. That all happens naturally. Then when the threat's over, your body goes back to normal. That's good anxiety.

Bad anxiety is when those things happen and your body doesn't go back to normal—you're still wired, you're still anxious, and you're up in the middle of the night. Or your body suddenly reacts to a threat, but there's no threat around. That's what is called a panic attack. We live in a fallen world, and sometimes our bodies misfire. But we are not our bodies, we can learn skills to deal with anxiety differently and work with our body and our mind as God intended.

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When you're anxious you need to speak kindly to yourself. Jason thinks often we speak kinder to others than we do to ourselves. God speaks kinder to us than we do to ourselves. Sometimes, we're very intense with ourself or others, tending to be corrective and defensive—especially when we want to fix things in our lives and please God. Jesus was really tough on hypocrites but he was so kind when dealing with those trying to do their best. As you're growing and learning how to deal with anxiety, you need to be kind to yourself. Let God speak to you in a kinder, gentler way that can undo some of the recordings in your own mind.

Being kinder and gentler to yourself doesn't mean letting yourself off the hook. It means you're trying to follow the way of Jesus, listening to what He says and considering His priorities in your life.

Jason believes that when you experience anxiety, you need coaching to get through the situation: you're anxious about "x," talk about what that is, identify it, face it, consider how you're feeling when you face it, and find some creative ways to deal with the negative feelings you're having.

This approach is much more action driven and outcome driven.

Jason also encourages people with anxiety to pray like Jesus

prayed, with honesty and transparency. When Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane He prayed honestly, saying take this cup from Me. Prayer-wise, we don't need to "put on our best face" to talk to God. If you're going to pray like Jesus, say exactly what you're feeling and thinking. God can handle that, and He wants that. Prayer isn't about getting rid of feelings; it's about being with God. Just start to pray and be honest.

With God, you can face your fears and discover grace and victory for your emotional healing.

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Marilyn Hickey founded Marilyn Hickey Ministries more than 45 years ago with God's vision to cover the earth with the Word. Marilyn co-hosts a daily television program, *Today with Marilyn & Sarah*, reaching a potential viewing audience of over 2 billion households worldwide. Marilyn communicates deep biblical truths in a way that is understandable and practical for everyday life. Listen to the podcast *Today with Marilyn and Sarah*.

Sarah Bowling is on a mission to connect every one with the heart of God while loving those who are overlooked, excluded, and ignored. Led by Holy Spirit and anchored in the Word, Sarah seeks to inspire all to know the unconditional and transformational love of God in our daily lives. A Bible teacher, author, international speaker, and a global humanitarian, Sarah also co-hosts a daily television program, *Today with Marilyn & Sarah*.