

This Common Stumbling Block Robs You of Intimacy With Jesus

Can you imagine Jesus ever being anxious? He carried the destiny of the whole world on His shoulders. From the moment of His birth, He had enemies who were out to trap, discredit and even kill Him. And yet He was not worried or anxious about His material needs, the responses of the people around Him, facing the devil or accomplishing His purpose in saving the world.

But that doesn't mean Jesus didn't have feelings and temptations. We know Jesus can sympathize with all our struggles. He "was in every sense tempted like we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15). He felt hunger, fatigue, pain, anger, weakness and sorrow. He faced the same temptations we do: greed, lust, bitterness and the urge to distrust His Father. He faced determined opposition from men and Satan himself. Yet He was not anxious.

And we are told to share the same attitude: "Be anxious for nothing" (Phil. 4:6). If God told us to do so, then He must know we can comply. As with all God's commands, we can't comply perfectly immediately just by wishing to do so. It takes understanding, growth and God's Word in our hearts to achieve that result.

So let's look at what Jesus and others in the New Testament had to say about anxiety and how we can experience freedom from anxiety in our own lives.

Being anxious doesn't make sense. It's unwise and harmful. Perhaps your rational mind already knows anxiety is usually irrational and counterproductive, but your feelings don't want to comply. Examining your underlying beliefs and making sure

they are consistent with what God says is an important step in bringing your thoughts and feelings into alignment with God. Jesus knew that as human beings we are prone to worry and anxiety, but you don't have to remain stuck there.

The first and most important reason of all to not be anxious is because that's what God has asked you to do. In one sense it's simply a matter of obedience. Thankfully there's also a lot more in God's Word to help you understand why—and how. And keep reading; we'll soon get to the practical steps of how you can accomplish this.

Worry won't change anything. Anxiety is borrowing tomorrow's troubles for today. Jesus said, "Therefore, take no thought about tomorrow, for tomorrow will take thought about the things of itself. Sufficient to the day is the trouble thereof" (Matt. 6:34). A big reason not to worry is that doing so will make absolutely no difference in the outcome.

It's not that God doesn't understand your worry; He does. But anxiety doesn't help. It uses up energy for no reason and gets you nowhere.

The next reason you shouldn't be anxious is that it stunts your spiritual growth and blocks a deeper relationship with God. Worry chokes your spiritual life.

Think of your very best human relationship. Perhaps it's with your spouse, a parent or a very close friend. You know everything about each other, and you can trust this person completely. If you don't have that kind of relationship, imagine it. Can you imagine being anxious about your relationship and trusting the person at the same time? Probably not. The more you know this person, the more your trust grows. There's no space for anxiety between you.

Just so, anxiety and worry impede your relationship with God. Worry constantly looks inward. Your focus is on yourself, and you can't hear anything else, not even what God is trying to

say to you.

The final big reason not to worry is that God has it covered. Your anxiety won't make Him work differently or more quickly. Resting in trust is the appropriate response.

So you should not be anxious, but how do you do that? It's one thing to know what you should do; it's quite another to do it successfully, especially when this involves so many emotions and subjective feelings. When anxiety has become your default way of responding to life or challenging situations, you need something more than "don't do it."

The Bible gives several steps that will help you do just that:

- Choose your thoughts (Phil. 4:8).
- Focus outside yourself (Matt. 6:33).
- Practice gratitude (1 Thess. 5:18).
- Enter His rest (Heb. 4:11).
- Cast your care on Him (1 Pet. 5:7).
- Let God handle the results (Matt. 10:19-20).

Perhaps the best way to encapsulate what we're saying about worry and anxiety is to remember again the Serenity Prayer: "God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference. Amen."

 *Adapted from Overcoming Fear & Anxiety Through Spiritual Warfare by Carol Peters-Tanksley, copyright 2017, published by Charisma House. This book will give you tools that will help you appropriate God's freedom and overcome fear and anxiety in your life. To order your copy click on this link.*

Prayer Power for the Week of March 4, 2018

This week, meditate on God's Word and appropriate His promises

when you pray. Ask the Lord to help you overcome any fear or anxiety that may be hindering your spiritual growth and the fulfillment of your God-given purpose. Continue to pray for worldwide revival and for more laborers for His harvest field. Pray for our leaders and all those in authority over us. Ask for favor, protection and godly wisdom as they make decisions affecting us and the entire world. Read 1 Thessalonians 5:18, Hebrews 4:11, 1 Peter 5:7.