



OVERCOMING ANXIETY

A Quick Guide to Small Groups





Summary

How to think biblically about anxiety and practical ways to comfort those who struggle with the unnerving emotion of anxiety.



Small Group Commitment #1
Growing Spiritually



Five Minute Read



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Of the 7.8 billion people living on this planet, most of us, if not all of us, are anxious about something. Through every stage of life, anxiety is a part of humanity. Anxiety is certainly one of my weaknesses. Personally, I could worry myself about everything all day long and still not reach the bottom of the anxious barrel. The motto of a chronic worrier is: “So much to worry about, so little time!” During these days of uncertainty, our anxieties can go from a simmer to a boil.

Fortunately, God has a lot to say about anxiousness. The idea of *anxiety* is discussed in the Bible more than 80 times. In fact, it’s mentioned so many times with varying terms and a wide range of examples, it’s a complicated topic in the Bible. I take comfort in this for two reasons. First, God knew we would struggle with anxiety, so He wrote about it repeatedly. Second, the complexity of anxiety in the Bible reflects the complexity of our own experience of it.

Scripture shows us that *anxiety* is an internal distress of the heart that causes mental and physical pain. This is not perceived pain. This is real.

Anxiety is complex because it starts in the heart. Throughout Scripture, the heart is the immaterial part of mankind. It is the control center of all our desires, thoughts and emotions. We see a range of these emotions across Scripture. Hannah was so anxious she would *not eat* (1 Samuel 1:15–16). David anxiously *groaned* and *wept* because he did not want to die (Psalm 6:2, 3, 10). Martha was anxiously *upset* as she wanted Jesus’ favor (Luke 10:39–42). Even the disciples were anxiously *startled* because of doubt when the resurrected Jesus appeared to them (Luke 24:37–38).

Proverbs 12:25 says, “Anxiety in a man’s heart weighs him down, but a good word makes him glad.” In the biblical examples above, each person is anxious because their hearts desperately want something that’s out of their control. This internal distress of their heart results in mental pain or physical despondence. The same is also true for us.

Jesus tell us four times in Matthew 6:25–34 that we shouldn’t be anxious.

Jesus knows our hearts bend inward as we worry about life. In fact, Jesus confronts our anxiety in verse 30 when He ties anxiousness to a lack of faith. Here, Jesus says the root of anxiety is ultimately *unbelief*. When we fail to have faith and believe in God, we become anxious and worried that God will not “pull through” for us or that He is not aware of our needs. But the opposite of unbelief is faith. In faith, we trust that God is aware of our situation.

Faith is believing the Word of God and acting upon it, no matter how you feel, because you know that in the end, God promises a good result.



Theological Truth

There is a way to replace anxiety with peace. But it is a battle. We must put on the full armor of God (Ephesians 6:10–20). We must take up the shield of faith (verse 16). We fight anxiety by fighting unbelief, and the way we fight unbelief is with truth. John Piper says we must fight against anxiety by the Spirit of God and the Word of Truth because these are great faith-builders. We read the promises of God, and we must pray for the Spirit to help us believe them.

If Jesus says don’t be anxious, this means there is a way to overcome it.

Prayer is how we humbly *cast our anxieties upon the Lord* (1 Peter 5:7) and proclaim our total dependency on Him. Paul tells us, “Don’t be anxious about anything, but by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving we should make

our requests known to God" (Philippians 4:6). Take the desires of your heart directly to the Lord, beg Him for help and leave them in His hands, trusting that He will do what is best. This is where peace is found (verse 7).

Here's how to come alongside others who are struggling with anxiety.

Love. Remember that love is what compels us toward Jesus and others. Show them your love by entering their world through empathy. Manifest Christ's love and look for ways to identify with their suffering.

Know. Listen as they share about their anxiousness. Ask good questions to gain clear insights into the desires of their hearts that may be driving their anxiety. Knowing someone in this way will help identify potential areas for change.

Speak. Colossians 3:14–16 reminds us that love binds us together in harmony and the result should be that we teach and admonish each other in all wisdom. Truly knowing an anxious person's struggle leads to words of encouragement by directing someone to God's truth in the Bible.

Do. Help them put into practice the truths they are learning from Scripture. Find practical ways to face their anxiety. While helping someone who is struggling with anxiety, it is important to discern the next steps. Think SOS:

- What is the *severity* of this situation?
- What is the level of *ownership* in this situation?
- How much *support* does this person have to grow and change?



Ideas to Consider

Mental Peace

- **Ask.** What do you want the most right now? What are some desires that are stirring up your anxious heart? What are some lies you might believe about yourself? What are some lies you might believe about God?
- **Read.** Meditate on the psalms, like Psalm 131.
- **Memorize.** Fill your mind with truth to help you trust God. Memorize Philippians 4:6–8.
- **Listen.** Create a playlist of your favorite worship songs and fill your mind with these truths.

Physical Peace

- **Write.** Create a list of 3–4 Bible passages that encourage you to trust God. Write each passage on a 3x5 card. The next time you feel anxious, review your 3x5 cards and meditate on these passages.
- **Exercise.** Get outside and go for a walk or run and ask God to help you battle your anxiety.
- **Sleep.** Anxiety often inhibits sleep. While lying in bed, don't scroll through your phone as a temporary distraction. Instead use this time praying for others or reading a book. Help settle your mind.
- **Serve.** Find someone you are close to and serve them in some way (i.e., mow their lawn, go shopping for them, make a gift basket, write an encouraging note, read the Bible together, etc.).

Emotional Peace

- **Identify.** Emotions can be an "early warning system" that alert us to the unsettled and anxious desires of our hearts. If you feel yourself slipping into anxious moments, it's helpful to identify the emotions you're feeling. What do those emotions reveal about what your heart is loving, trusting and fearing?
- **Act.** While it's important to grow in self-awareness and understand your anxious feelings, it's equally important to not act upon them. Rather than acting on emotions that you are feeling, act on the truth of God's Word that you are filling your heart and mind with. This will ensure your feelings are in line with truth.
- **Cry Out.** The psalms invite us to express our emotions to God. After you identify your anxious feelings, take them to God by reading a psalm that best expresses how you are feeling.



Theological Truth

Scripture shows us that *anxiety* is an internal distress of the heart that causes mental and physical pain. We must battle this unbelief with the truth of God's Word and by the power of the Holy Spirit. The opposite of unbelief is faith. In faith, we trust that God is aware of our situation.



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