



A Care and Counseling Initiative



Supporting and Caring for People

Who Are Struggling With Fear and Anxiety



*Charis is an Urban Alliance initiative. [www.urbanalliance.com](http://www.urbanalliance.com)*

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*Through Charis,  
Urban Alliance  
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Many people who are struggling with their relational, emotional and mental health do not receive the support they need. They often do not know where to turn for help, or are embarrassed to acknowledge they are struggling. Additionally, a lack of resources in the community, poverty and stigma are barriers that keep people from receiving help.

Research shows that the church is one of the most common places people go to seek help when they are struggling emotionally. This is why it is so important for pastors and care providers to be equipped to offer care and connect people to appropriate help. Many churches offer support groups, care ministries or pastoral care. And, professional counselors who offer care from a Christian perspective provide services in the community.

Through Charis, Urban Alliance works with churches and parachurch organizations to help them communicate about mental health in ways that offer hope and create safe environments where people feel comfortable seeking help. Urban Alliance also equips care providers to respond sensitively, effectively connect people who are seeking care to appropriate support, and provide care, so they may cope well and heal.

The Charis website is a tool, managed by Urban Alliance, that can be used by individuals and organizations to help connect people in need of support to high-quality professional counselors, support groups and specialized support services offered from a Christian perspective.

These collaborative efforts have helped hundreds of people overcome barriers and more effectively cope, have ongoing support, strengthen their relationships, experience hope, joy and peace, and persevere despite life's challenges.

*To learn more about Charis, visit [www.urbanalliance.com/charis](http://www.urbanalliance.com/charis).*

*To visit the Charis website, visit [www.charisnetworkct.org](http://www.charisnetworkct.org).*





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### *What are Fear and Anxiety?*

Fear is an emotional response that results when a person believes they are in danger. Anxiety is a feeling of worry, uneasiness or apprehension about a future event with an uncertain outcome. Fear can be a healthy response when a person is in actual danger. However, fear and anxiety can become problematic when the person is not actually in danger.

Everyone experiences fear and anxiety at some point in their lives. We live in an uncertain world where disappointment and pain are an ever present reality. An important part of a Christian's growth and maturity is learning to cope with the uncertainty of the world and the possibility that tomorrow may hold new challenges, or even pain, and to seek help when they are struggling.

## Understanding Fear and Anxiety

In many cases, a person's fears and anxieties reveal what they love or deeply care about.<sup>1</sup> For example, a person may experience fear or anxiety because they perceive that they might not get something they want or might lose something they deeply love. Common fears include:

- Fear for your safety and the safety of those you love
- Fear about dying or how you will die
- Fears about what happens after death
- Fear about being unloved or alone
- Fear about being in love and the high probability of being hurt
- Fears about what you might lose
- Fear of what other people think of you
- Fears about not getting something you want

There is wisdom in listening to fears and not just disregarding them as silly or irrational emotions. By listening to fears and anxieties, a person can learn more about how they see themselves and the world. They may hear things such as, "I am in danger," "I am vulnerable," "I need (and might not get)," "This is valuable to me, I love it and have put my trust in it," or "I could die." By listening to fears, a person can learn more about themselves and what they deeply care for. Fears and anxieties can be like weeds. When a person tries to get rid of them without addressing the root causes, in time they reemerge.

## The Source of Peace

Since anxiety and fear are universal struggles, an important question is, "Where do I find peace when I am anxious?" When a person is experiencing anxiety, a common reaction is to do something to feel more in control. This can take a number of different forms, including rehearsing the situation over and over in their mind, taking action to prevent a negative outcome, or avoiding and planning for the worst case scenario. And while there is nothing wrong with proactively addressing a situation, we are not in control and control will not ultimately give peace. Rather, God wants us to bring our fears and anxieties to Him and He will give us peace.

*"Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:6-7)*

God wants His children to bring every care and concern to Him because He cares and wants to help. At the same time, this verse should not be used to discourage a person from seeking help from supportive friends and professionals. While God is the ultimate source of peace and healing, He may choose to use other people and types of support in a person's individual healing process. It is particularly important for people with anxiety disorders to have a variety of supports in their lives.

## Our Generous Father and King

*Throughout the Bible, God tells His people “do not be afraid.” This is repeated over 300 times in the New and Old Testaments:*

*After this, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: “Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.”(Genesis 15:1)*

*Then he continued, “Do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them.”( Daniel 10:12)*

*But Jesus immediately said to them: “Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.” (Matthew 14:27)*

*“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.” (John 14:27)*

Understanding who God is helps us to better understand this statement and to develop a Biblical view of God that can bring comfort and peace when we are fearful and anxious. God hears us, He knows we are fearful, afraid, and anxious, and He cares.

Jesus says, “Do not be afraid little flock, for your father is pleased to give you the kingdom.” (Luke 12:32) The God who says do not be afraid is our father and king, and he is generous.<sup>4</sup>

As a Father, God is near and gentle and cares deeply for the concerns of His children. Think of the story of the Prodigal Son. Upon the son’s return, the father, in his delight, ran and embraced his son. God gave us this image to help us understand His love for us.

God the Father is also the King. This means He has authority over the heavens and the earth. He is in control of each and every detail of the lives of every person on the earth. Fathers can give begrudgingly and kings can be stingy. But, God the Father and King is generous and gives to His children out of delight and pleasure. He is always working on their behalf and for their good.

Who God is makes all the difference! When we trust our feelings to define who God is we can become overwhelmed by fear and anxiety. If we feel orphaned, we believe we are orphaned. If we feel impending doom, we believe the worst will happen and there is no hope. When our feelings conflict with what Scripture says about who God is we must choose to trust Scripture and not our emotions.

## What Are Anxiety Disorders?

If fear and anxiety become excessive and overwhelming in a person's life they may be experiencing an anxiety disorder. Anxiety disorders are characterized by steady, all-consuming anxieties that interfere with a person's daily activities such as job performance, school, work, or relationships. Over the course of their lifetime, 29% of adults will at some point struggle with an anxiety disorder.<sup>2</sup> In a given year, about 18% of the population struggles with an anxiety disorder.<sup>3</sup> Children also experience anxiety. In fact, the average age of when a person first experiences an anxiety disorder) is at 11 years.<sup>2</sup>

Common anxiety disorders include<sup>4</sup>:

### *Generalized Anxiety Disorder:*

People with generalized anxiety disorder display excessive anxiety or worry for months and face several anxiety-related symptoms such as:

- Restlessness or feeling wound up or on edge
- Being easily fatigued
- Difficulty concentrating or having their minds go blank
- Irritability
- Muscle tension
- Difficulty controlling the worry
- Sleep problems (difficulty falling or staying asleep or restless, unsatisfying sleep)

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### *Obsessive Compulsive Disorder:*

People with OCD may have symptoms of obsessions, compulsions or both. These symptoms can interfere with all aspects of life, such as work, school, and personal relationships.

Obsessions are repeated thoughts, urges, or mental images that cause anxiety.

Common symptoms include:

- Fear of germs or contamination
- Unwanted forbidden or taboo thoughts involving sex, religion and harm
- Aggressive thoughts towards others or self
- Having things symmetrical or in a perfect order

Compulsions are repetitive behaviors that a person with OCD feels the urge to do in response to an obsessive thought. Common compulsions include:

Common compulsions include:

- Excessive cleaning and/or handwashing
- Ordering and arranging things in a particular, precise way
- Repeatedly checking on things
- Compulsive counting



## What Are Anxiety Disorders?

### *Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (continued):*

Not all rituals or habits are compulsions. Everyone double checks things sometimes. But a person with OCD generally:

- Can't control his or her thoughts or behaviors, even when those thoughts or behaviors are recognized as excessive
- Spends at least 1 hour a day on these thoughts or behaviors
- Doesn't get pleasure when performing the behaviors or rituals, but may feel brief relief from the anxiety their thoughts cause
- Experiences significant problems in their daily life due to these thoughts or behaviors

*In any given year, about 18% of the population struggles with an anxiety disorder.*

### *Social Anxiety Disorder:*

People with social anxiety disorder have a marked fear of social or performance situations in which they expect to feel embarrassed, judged, rejected or fearful of offending others. Social anxiety disorder symptoms include:

- Feeling highly anxious about being with other people and having a hard time talking to them
- Feeling very self-conscious in front of other people and worried about feeling humiliated, embarrassed, rejected, or fearful of offending others
- Being very afraid that other people will judge them
- Worrying for days or weeks before an event where other people will be
- Staying away from places where there are other people
- Having a hard time making friends and keeping friends
- Blushing, sweating or trembling around other people
- Feeling nauseous or sick to their stomach when other people are around

### *Panic Disorder:*

People with panic disorder have recurrent, unexpected panic attacks, which are sudden periods of intense fear that may include palpitations, pounding heart, or accelerated heart rate, sweating, trembling or shaking, sensations of shortness of breath, smothering, or choking, and feeling of impending doom. Panic disorder symptoms include:

- Sudden and repeated attacks of intense fear
- Feelings of being out of control during a panic attack
- Intense worries about when the next attack will happen
- Fear or avoidance of places where previous panic attacks have occurred

### *Phobias:*

A person with a phobia has an intense, irrational fear of something that poses little or no actual danger. Some of the more common specific phobias are centered around closed-in places, heights, escalators, tunnels, driving on highways, water, flying, dogs, and injuries involving blood. Such phobias aren't just extreme fear; they are irrational fear of a particular thing. A person may be able to ski the world's tallest mountains with ease but be unable to go above the 5th floor of an office building. While adults with phobias realize that these fears are irrational, they often find that facing, or even thinking about facing, the feared object or situation brings on a panic attack or severe anxiety.



## What Causes Anxiety Disorders?



*There are a number of factors that can contribute to a person's anxiety symptoms, including:*

**Genes:** Research suggests that for some people, genetics play a significant role in mental health struggles. Some find that medications reduce their anxiety symptoms.

**Unhealthy Thinking Patterns:** Identifying negative and unhealthy thinking patterns and replacing them with healthy coping strategies and healthy thinking patterns helps improve anxiety symptoms.

**Poor Physical Health:** It is important for all people to take care of their physical bodies with proper nutrition, exercise, and rest. These practices are linked to improved emotional health and can mitigate symptoms of anxiety. Additionally, some physical health conditions such as an overactive thyroid can cause anxiety symptoms.

**Life Stress:** People with higher levels of stress are at increased risk for experiencing anxiety. Stress

can be due to not setting healthy boundaries (taking on too much, over-working by choice) or situations out of a person's control (illness, loss of employment, domestic violence, single parenting).

**Spiritual:** There can be spiritual causes for anxiety as well. For example, a person's distorted view of God as an angry judge can result in feelings of insecurity and anxiety. Spiritual warfare or spiritual bondage can also cause a number of emotional struggles including anxiety.

In reality, it is nearly impossible to know the exact degree to which a person's anxiety is the result of one particular cause. It is important for people who struggle with anxiety to understand their support and treatment options and have referral information for a variety of care and counseling services, such as professional counselors, prayer ministries, pastoral care, support groups and medication management providers.



*All people struggle with fear and anxiety from time to time, and 1 in 5 people currently have an anxiety disorder. This is why it is important for care providers to be equipped with tools to help people who are struggling.*

All people struggle with fear and anxiety from time to time, and 1 in 5 people currently have an anxiety disorder. This is why it is important for care providers to be equipped with tools to help people who are struggling. Listed below are ways a care provider can care for and support a person who is struggling with fear and anxiety:

**1. Take time to understand your feelings.** It is important to understand the nature of your feelings of fear or anxiety. The first step is putting into words the reason you are experiencing these emotions. Find a trusted friend to talk to or try journaling. Consider if your emotions are telling you something about how you view yourself, how you view the world or how you view God. Some anxiety is normal, however, when anxiety gets in the way of your day-to-day life or your anxious thoughts don't make sense or seem irrational, it is important to seek professional help.

**2. Use Scripture as an anchor to adjust thinking.** Once you can articulate your fear or anxiety, consider where there is alignment and misalignment with Scripture. Scripture can be used as an anchor or tool to measure thoughts and emotions against. This can help you to know when you are experiencing an emotion that reflects a distortion or when your thoughts or emotions reflect truth.



## Supporting People Who Struggle With Fear and Anxiety

**3. Seek God.** God cares when His children are distressed and wants to offer peace, comfort and hope. That is why a critical aspect of coping with fears and anxieties is bringing them to God and asking for help. All too often, people feel embarrassed about having emotions that do not align with Scripture and want to hide them. On the contrary, God wants you to draw near to Him and give Him access to your heart so He can offer comfort and help.

**4. Find healthy outlets.** It is important to help a person find healthy outlets when they are struggling with anxiety. For some people, anxiety feels like pent up energy looking for a release. Healthy outlets for anxiety include activities such as exercising, prayer, worship, journaling or talking. The following activities can help a person calm their mind and body:

*Deep Breathing:* Deep breathing can help reduce stress and anxiety and help the body physically relax. Believers can replace counting with prayers or quotes from the Bible.

- Exhale completely through your mouth, making a whoosh sound.
- Close your mouth and inhale quietly through your nose to a mental count of four.
- Hold your breath for a count of seven.
- Exhale completely through your mouth, making a whoosh sound to a count of eight.
- This is one breath. Now inhale again and repeat the cycle three more times for a total of four breaths.

*Progressive Muscle Relaxation:* Progressive Muscle Relaxation is a technique where a person relaxes their muscles through a two-step process. First, they systematically tense particular muscle groups in their body one at a time, such as their neck, shoulders, torso, and legs. Next, they release the tension one muscle group at a time and notice how their muscles feel when they relax them. This helps physically relax a person's muscles and still their thoughts as they focus on the feeling of tension being released.

*God cares when His children are distressed and wants to offer peace, comfort and hope. That is why a critical aspect of coping with fears and anxieties is bringing them to our heavenly Father and asking for help.*



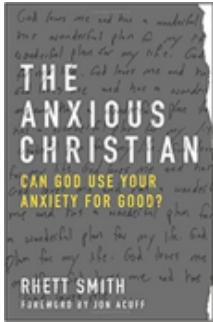
*A variety of types of supports such as a primary care physician, professional counselor, support groups, pastoral care, and faithful friends can help a person who is struggling with anxiety.*

**5. Build in Appropriate Support:** When a person is experiencing fear or anxiety they are in need of additional support. Often Christians feel embarrassed about experiencing fear or anxiety because they are familiar with Scripture that says not to be afraid. Feelings of shame or embarrassment compounded with fear and anxiety can create a very vulnerable state. Therefore, it is particularly important not to make statements that cause the person to feel condemnation. A variety of types of supports such as a primary care physician, professional counselor, support groups, pastoral care, and faithful friends can help a person who is struggling with anxiety. Each person's need for support varies depending on their unique situation.



## Resources

Below are resources written from a Christian perspective that equip counselors and care providers to support people who are experiencing fear and/or anxiety:

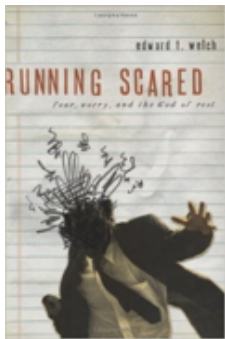


Rhett Smith

### *The Anxious Christian: Can God Use Your Anxiety for Good?*

Is anxiety “un-Christian”? Many Christians believe the answer to this question is yes! Understandably, then, many Christians feel shame when they are anxious. They especially feel this shame when well-intentioned fellow believers dismiss or devalue anxiety with Christian platitudes and Bible verses.

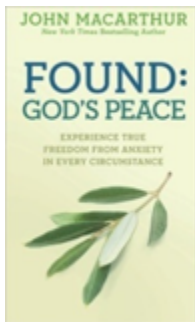
Rhett Smith, Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist, helps us understand anxiety in a new way. Rhett argues that, rather than being destructive or shameful, anxiety can be a catalyst for our spiritual growth. Using Biblical thinking and personal examples, Rhett explains how anxiety allows us to face our resistance and fears, understand where those fears come from, and then make intentional decisions about issues such as career, marriage, money, and our spiritual lives.



Edward T. Welch

### *Running Scared: Fear, Worry, and the God of Rest*

In his new release, *Running Scared*, Edward T. Welch investigates the roots of fear in the human soul and the ramifications of living in the grips of anxiety, worry, and dread. Welch encourages readers to discover for themselves that the Bible is full of beautiful words of comfort for fearful people (and that every single person is afraid of something). Within the framework of thirty topical meditations, Welch offers sound biblical theology and moment-by-moment, thoughtful encouragement for life-saving rescue in the midst of the heart and mind battlefield of rampant panic-stricken responses. *Running Scared* affirms that, through Scripture, God speaks directly to our fears: on money and possessions, on people and their judgments, and on death, pain, and punishment.



John MacArthur

### *Found: God's Peace Experiencing True Freedom from Anxiety in Every Circumstance*

In *Found: God's Peace*, trusted pastor and teacher John MacArthur tackles this vital question head-on. Throughout the book, MacArthur shares principles to help you overcome uncertainty, defeat worry, and experience true freedom from anxiety.

As Pastor John MacArthur writes, the key to worry-free living is to replace worry with prayer, right thinking, and action. Here he draws on rich biblical truths to show us how.

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### Citations:

<sup>1</sup>Welch, E. (2007). *Running Scared: Fear Worry and Rest in God*. Greensboro, North Carolina.

<sup>2</sup>Kessler, R.C., Berglund, P.A., Demler, O., Jin, R., Walters, E.E. (2005). Lifetime prevalence and age-of-onset distributions of DSM-IV disorders in the National Comorbidity Survey Replication (NCS-R). *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 62(6), 593-602.

<sup>3</sup>Kessler, R.C., Chiu, W.T., Demler, O., Walters, E.E. (2005). Prevalence, severity, and comorbidity of twelve-month DSM-IV disorders in the National Comorbidity Survey Replication (NCS-R). *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 62(6), 617-27.

<sup>4</sup>National Institute of Mental Health (2013). Anxiety Disorders. Retrieved June 22, 2017, from [nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/anxiety-disorders/index.shtml](http://nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/anxiety-disorders/index.shtml)

