

# How Anxiety Develops

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## **Anxious about anxiety**

The first time I read in the Bible the words “Don’t be anxious about anything” I immediately got anxious. I thought, what is the matter with me? I should not be so anxious! Later on I discovered that I was guilty of a “Biblical blunder that bruises and confuses.” These occur when we miss God’s point:

*The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:5b-7).*

Paul is here encouraging us to rely on God when we start to worry. He is not shaming us or encouraging us to deny our feelings. The comfort in this verse is GOD IS NEAR.

## HOW ANXIETY DEVELOPS

Anxiety is a secondary emotion that is the result of conflicting tensions between stressors and repressors. Before we feel anxious, we feel hurt, sad, needy, guilty, afraid, etc... Then we deny that feeling because we are too busy to pause and deal with our true feelings or our feelings don’t fit our expectations of who we should be. The combination of the stressors and the repressors is like having our one foot on the gas pedal and the other foot on the brake pedal – we are fighting ourselves. Examples of anxiety that are winning in a person are:

Generalized Anxiety Disorder – Social situations cause discomfort

Panic disorder – these people actually become short of breath and manifest other symptoms serious enough to go to the emergency room

PTSD – memories of unpleasant events are brought back. Nightmares and night sweats are common

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, Anxiety Disorders affect one in eight Americans between the years of 18-54. That is nearly 20 million anxious people.

## **LEARNING TO SET LIMITS**

Most people who struggle with anxiety expect themselves to be super-strong and do or be anything they want without having to deal with anxiety. In order for progress to be made, they have to learn to set limits on lies.

<u>THREAT</u>	<u>LIE</u>	<u>SYMPTOM</u>	<u>LIE</u>	<u>PANIC</u>
Hurt	I'm too sensitive	Racing Heart	I can't stand this	
Conflict	I can't voice my feelings	Shallow Breathing	I'm losing control	

<u>THREAT</u>	<u>lie</u>	<u>SYMPTOM</u>	<u>LIE</u>	<u>PANIC</u>
Stress	I have to be strong	Sweats	What do others think?	
Demand	I can't show my feelings	Upset stomach	I'm dying	

<u>THREAT</u>	<u>TRUTH</u>	<u>SYMPTOM</u>	<u>TRUTH</u>	<u>COPE</u>
Hurt	Normal to feel		I can handle this	
Conflict	God meets my needs		Let it pass	
Stress	Depend on God is good		Friends accept my fears	
Demand	God is near		God has never	Let me down

Accepting the reality of anxiety but dealing with it on the level of truth as opposed to feelings is calming. The place to take your feelings is to God and to trusted, caring

friends. When you verbalize your feelings to them, you gain perspective on your struggle, you understand your situation more clearly, and it brings home the realization that someone cares to listen, understand, and struggle with you until you are encouraged. THE LORD IS NEAR!

#### HOMEWORK: A Self-Test

1. Agitated – Are you easily frustrated, irritated, or upset? Do you lose your temper often?
2. Not sleeping? Are you having trouble getting to sleep or staying asleep? Do you often wake up and not feel rested?
3. X-Fears? – Do you have any fears that you accommodate by avoiding situations?
4. In touch with your body? – Do you have any physical symptoms like shortness of breath, sweating palms, or tingling sensations?

5. Escalating worries? – Are you worried about problems you are facing? Do your thoughts race out of control?
6. Traumas relived? – Does your mind keep experiencing an upsetting event?
7. Yes all the time? Do you feel pressured to say yes to other people, to your perfectionism, or to make controlling thoughts go away?

(Scoring: Two or more “yes” answers suggests you might have a problem with anxiety)