



10 Practices to Give Anxiety over to God

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"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:6-7)

For a long time, I thought anxiety was a purely spiritual problem. If I felt a pit of dread in my stomach, or my thoughts spiraled into a black hole of self-loathing, then clearly, I was not believing in Jesus' promises hard enough. I'd redouble my prayer efforts and bulk up my knowledge of Bible verses, but to my immense shame, little changed. After years of zero results, I decided Paul's words to "be anxious for nothing" were simply wishful thinking. Here's what I missed about Paul's advice:

Spiritual problems have spiritual solutions, of course—God's omniscient power, theology, prayer, and repentance. But they also require practical action. We wouldn't pray about tithing without setting up a bank draft, and we wouldn't pray about "not neglecting to meet together," without setting an alarm for Sunday morning. Neglect the practical, and you may end up like I did—in unfruitful despair.

Thanks be to God—there are very practical, tangible things we can do to follow Paul's advice about anxiety. By pursuing small steps of healing, not only will we take God's Word about our fears seriously, but we'll stop feeling so anxious. May each one of us learn how to be freed from dread. Here are 10 practices to help you "Be Anxious for Nothing":

1. Let God Be God

I once thought fighting anxiety was primarily *my* job. If I felt anxious, it meant I was a spiritual failure. Yet in Galatians 5, Paul reminds us to *"live by the Spirit,"* and the fruits that result from that dependence. The *Spirit* produces fruit in our lives—not us. Yes, we participate in our transformation, but we are no more able to will ourselves to stop feeling anxious than Peter could have walked on water without Jesus.

Let God be Lord of your thoughts, including anxious ones. Feeling anxious is not a personal failure but an invitation to allow God into our emotions and lives. Let the Almighty direct you to the next right thing to do, not in shame, but in brave, humble dependence.

2. View Anxiety as an Urgent Signal to Act

Your anxiety is not a sign of spiritual weakness—it's an emergency warning sign. Something in your life—unsafe relationships, off-kilter brain chemistry, over-packed schedule, trauma—is causing you agony. Anxiety is a mayday signal, warning you to *do something*.

Feeling momentary anxiety isn't actually the biggest problem. Instead, Paul warns us not to *BE* anxious—a long-term state. Notice anxiety, treat it seriously, and let the Holy Spirit guide you to practical ways to deal with it.

3. Get to Roots of Anxiety, Not the Symptoms

Anxiety is merely a symptom of deeper problems. For me, it usually surges up because of busyness, loss, or people that make me feel unsafe. If I try to quash the feeling of anxiety rather than seeking peace, honesty, or healthier boundaries, I *never* successfully calm my fears.

Trying to pray away anxiety is like taking aspirin to soothe a toothache. You might not feel discomfort for a few hours, but the pain will rush back once the meds wear off. You need to remove the infection causing the pain. Prayer should spur us to action, not passivity.

4. Get Professional Help for Anxiety

My anxiety stems from three main sources: childhood trauma, unhealthy coping mechanisms I learned to survive, and a genetic predisposition. It was not until I got two years of therapy that I was able to take wise steps to heal that grief and learn new ways of managing overwhelm.

Medication, which has saved some of my friends' lives, is also only available with professional help. If your anxiety feels overwhelming, and nothing you do helps, find a therapist, stat.

5. Set Healthy Boundaries

Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend define boundaries like this: "A boundary shows me where I end and someone else begins..." The tagline of their book about boundaries puts it even more succinctly: "When to Say Yes, and How to Say No."

Learning to say yes and no is an antidote for fear. As Cloud and Townsend point out, God exhorts us to "*guard our hearts*" (Proverbs 4:23). For me, this looked like saying no to things that shamed me, and yes to taking care of myself and loving people more honestly. If you do not have boundaries, you *will* feel anxious; it's like living in an unsafe neighborhood with your front door wide open.

6. Pursue Sabbath

The Bible literally begins with rest, modeled for us by a God of omnipotence. If the Creator of all sets aside time to rest, then all of us can. For me, setting aside a day to abstain from social media, chores, and work unveiled how much workaholism fueled me. I was afraid of stillness, afraid of quiet—and so I drove myself hard every day of the week. When I finally rested, I found more stillness and peace every day.

7. Seek Joy Over Spiritual Obligation

In my journey away from anxiety, I was surprised to discover how much my spiritual practices contributed to the pit of fear in my stomach. For most of my life, I assumed that the hardest, most demanding spiritual disciplines were the best—and as a result, I procrastinated or felt burdened by them.

Learning to spend time with God through song, in long walks, in art or community has made time with Jesus a respite instead of another thing I'm failing to do.

8. Try One-Word or "Rote" Prayers When Anxious Thoughts Hit

Prayer used to increase my anxiety instead of lessening it. But when I began praying liturgies (mostly from the Episcopal *Book of Common Prayer*), I began connecting to God without anxiety spiking. Anne Lamott's book *Help, Thanks, Wow: The Three Essential Prayers* also changed my approach. When I feel too anxious to pray, I *can* say one word.

Bowing before God without having to think so much freed me. It also taught me to depend more on God's power than my brain. Now, I find prayer one of the *most* effective ways to fight anxiety. I'd bet this tickles Jesus pink.

9. Pay Attention to Your Body

Anxiety often caused me to mistrust my body and my emotions. It gave me stomachaches and shaky hands, kept me from connecting to people or pursuing my dreams, and made me feel silenced and helpless.

But as I learned to see anxiety as a signal of distress instead of an unwelcome betrayal, I realized my body had great wisdom. Insomnia helped me notice hormonal cycles and my own grief. Shakiness and irritability reminded me to rest or eat. And anxiety meant I wasn't listening to my emotions or being honest with myself.

Our emotions shouldn't rule our lives, but listening to them ultimately helps us be more in tune with ourselves, and wiser with our actions. Rather than shoving body and mind away when they don't "behave," draw nearer to your precious body and pay attention.

10. Turn Your Eyes to the Present Moment

Jesus counsels us not to "*worry about tomorrow*," (Matthew 6:34) which I find terribly difficult advice. But I've begun sitting still for five minutes each day, breathing deeply, and continually turning my mind back to simple prayers like the Jesus prayer. When my thoughts jitterbug away, I gently return them to Christ. In periods of stress, the practice gives me strength. Even when I'm shaken or angry, it's ever easier to still my mind, breathe, and pray.

I Am Thankful for Anxiety

Anxiety used to plague and harass me, but now I see it differently. It's much like the warning lights on my car's dashboard. Without those signals, I might damage my car by not knowing something's wrong. Even though I sigh every time the dashboard lights up, I am grateful for the gentle reminder to see a mechanic quickly.

If we see anxiety as a cautionary warning rather than a personal failing, we can begin to discern how to change our lives. God can use your anxiety to reveal old wounds, expose your lack of honesty with yourself and others, or illuminate pain that you need to heal from. These warning signals might not be any more welcome than your Check Engine light, but they can save you a great deal of heartache. Do not be ashamed or afraid of your anxious thoughts. Instead, as Paul counsels, submit them to God—and do something about them.

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