

How to Conquer Worry, Fear, and Anxiety

(selected scriptures)

Introduction: Worry, fear and anxiety during the coronavirus pandemic

We are living an exceptional time now with the corona virus wreaking havoc upon our health and economies. Chaos and destruction *shouldn't* of course come as a shock to us Christians. We know that we live in a fallen and cursed world (Gen. 3:17; Rom. 8:22), and thus chaos and destruction is to be expected. In fact, we ought to be surprised and thankful for any brief periods of calm and peace we get to experience.

However, we have, at least I have, been conditioned to forget this, because, overall, the past decades have been a marathon of blessings, at least in a worldly and material sense. Our parents' generations experienced a surge in standard of living over their parents', and our generation has experienced the same. Compare your life to the life of your parents, when they were the same age as you are now, and you will likely see a gargantuan difference. Furthermore, there has been relative calm and peace in countries where Christianity, especially Protestantism, has had a strong influence.

Ironically, as referenced by Proverbs 30:9, the spiritual strength of Christians seems to have been declining as our material comforts have been increasing. After all, when we're comfortable and we don't have problems, why would we need God? Now, the coronavirus has shaken all nations from their comfort. Societies, us Christians included, are in a state of worry, fear, and anxiety, and I absolutely understand why.

Causes of anxiety and worry

[Discussion: What are some common sources of anxiety during this trial?]

Maybe the virus has attacked you or someone close. Perhaps, you can't work, are not earning income, and have debts to pay. Maybe, you are simply scared about the virus affecting you or yours.

These are anxious and worrying times, but this isn't anything new. Most of Biblical history is about such times. The flood wiped out almost all of humanity, Jews were slaves in Egypt for 400 years, and later exiled to Babylon for 70 years.

God's people haven't been spared on an individual level either.

[Discussion: Can you think of examples when Biblical figures were in great anxiety?]

One of Adam's kids killed the other and things didn't get any better from there on out. Hebrews 11:37 describes various trials of believers throughout history: **They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated.** Doesn't sound like fun, and let's not forget about Jesus's himself. His lived a life of difficulty, only to

be tortured and crucified.

Looking back at these guys, I'm even ashamed of some of the things that get me worrying and anxious, as they are in no way comparable, and I don't think most of you are in immediate danger of being sawn in two either. So, since in general we have lived lives of such abundant blessing, I want to look at two examples to which we can perhaps relate better and see what we can learn and apply to our present trials.

In Genesis 30, Rachel was so anxious to have a child that she told her husband, Jacob, to give her children or she would die. That's quite extreme!

In Esther 4, Jews were panicked about a royal decree allowing them to be massacred. Queen Esther was anxious since she was planning to risk her life for her people.

The Bible's position on anxiety and worry

Luckily for us, God has not left us without instructions for dealing with worry and anxiety. The Bible has a *simple* command about this: **Do not be anxious about anything** (Php 4:6).

What does "anything" include? Everything! We are commanded not to be anxious about our jobs, viruses, uncertainty, everything! It couldn't be any clearer than this.

I don't think this is news to you though. We know the Bible commands us not to be anxious, yet we are. So, what's the problem and what can be done about it?

Anxiety and worry are sin

What you may not have realized is that the Biblical figures we just read about, were sinning in their state of worry and anxiety. Being anxious is a clear violation of the instructions of the Bible. Not only were Rachel and the Jews in the book of Ester sinning by worrying and being anxious, but an additional sin was at the root of their sin of worry and anxiety.

[Discussion: What sins were causing anxiety in Rachel's and Esther's situations?]

Rachel's anxiety was caused by an *unfulfilled desire, specifically, the desire* to have children. There is nothing wrong in wanting a child, but it's sinful to be anxious about it. *God* opens or closes the womb (1. Sam. 1:5).

With Esther and her fellow Jews, it was fear of death and the unknown. Being afraid of death is smart. That fear keeps us alive in many situations, because it makes us careful. Also, wanting a child is a good desire and the Bible *says* children are a blessing (Ps. 127:5). It's good to want this blessing.

The problem arises when we make smart and good desires, such as staying alive or wanting a child, into idols that surpass God. After all, do you know better than God if your staying alive or having a child is going to be the best outcome for God's glory and your eternal benefit?¹ You might think you know better, but you don't. If you are anxious about something, it means you either doubt God is incapable or unwilling to do what's optimal.

¹ <https://www.gotquestions.org/glorify-God-in-everything.html>

These are no small things, doubting God, being anxious, and setting your desires as idols above God are grave sins. Furthermore, it's important to realize the root sin from which all other sins spring forth, is selfishness. Why do we commit the sin of stealing? Because we are selfish. Why do we lie? Because we'd rather lie than suffer from telling the truth. Our sin of selfishness is ultimately the root of all other sin.

I was personally guilty of this the other day as I was getting anxious about a health condition of someone very close to me. But this person loves Jesus! I know she would go to heaven to be with him, even if she were to die. I know she'll be better off in heaven than here on earth. So, why was I anxious about her health condition? Mostly because of selfish reasons. I was thinking "oh man, I'll be very sad if this person dies and leaves me." Sure, I could brainwash myself into thinking that "oh no, you're just anxious because you care about that person". But, that's not true. If this person dies believing in Jesus, do you think she'll be sad to be with God? That she'll be thinking "Boy, I wish I still were in that cursed earth, filled with sin!". Of course not, but I would prefer to drag her back here just so I would be happier. That's quite selfish.

Before you go to sleep tonight, analyze the causes of your fears and anxieties and repent. Is fear of the unknown is leading you to anxiety? Leave the "worrying" to the God who knows and controls everything (Ps. 68:20). Are you anxious, because you are surrounded by what may appear to be overwhelming circumstances? Stop distrusting God and instead have faith. Stop putting your own personal desires about your life and the lives of others, above God.

Assessment of your spiritual maturity

However, the coronavirus trial we are all in now is not all bad. It brings Christians an opportunity to analyze *our* spiritual maturity and goals—what we *treasure* in life. Can you better evaluate your spiritual maturity when life is going great or during an ordeal? How do you react when things that are important to you, get taken away? Do you get angry? How do you react when your comforts are taken away? Are you bitter or depressed?

Trials reveal your true level of spiritual maturity. Have you been trying to witness to some friends and family about Jesus? How you react during trials speaks ten times louder (1. Joh. 3:18; Jam. 2:17). Simultaneously, during these trials, *you* will see your weaknesses, after which you can humble yourself before God to request power to overcome and master these weaknesses through the power of the Holy Spirit that dwells in you.

God's will for your life

When thoughts of worry and anxiety start bombarding your brain, it's important you remember God's will for you! Perhaps, you don't know or remember his will for you, but you don't have to run around searching. He reveals it *clearly* in his Word.

[Discussion: What is God's prime objective in the life of a Christian? Is it for the Christian to have an easy, comfortable life or something else?]

If you don't know God's will for you, pay attention as I will reveal it now:

Rom 8:28 **And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.**

Rom 8:29 **For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.**

God's will is that you be conformed to the image of his son. If you are a Christian, if you have repented of your sins, accepted that Jesus died on the cross to pay the punishment God's justice demands, then you can't even outrun this. God says he has predestined you to be conformed to the image of his son. How do you think that happens? How do you think you'll become more like Jesus? By living on "Easy Street", or through a series of character-building trials and tribulations through which God demonstrates his power and thus builds up your faith and trust in him?

I'm sorry, if nobody's ever told this to you before, but after you become a Christian, your life will be a series of trials, or rather opportunities, to shape you into becoming more like Jesus.² You lose your job, do you trust God or not? You or someone close to you gets a severe illness or even dies. How do you react? Do you trust God's sovereignty and plans? Remember that nothing can happen in this world without the approval of God, and all that he allows to happen is for the benefit of us believers (Rom. 8:28). You can either believe this, or not believe, and thus accuse God of being a liar. However, let me tell you that he does not like being treated as a liar.

The weapon against fear and anxiety: Your memory

"Ok Mr. Preacher", you say, "I believe in and agree with everything you are telling me, but I still get worried and anxious. What can I do?"

[Discussion: What can Christians do when thoughts of fear and anxiety attack their minds?]

The best-known teaching on anxiety is in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 6), through which our Lord warns us against being anxious about the various cares of this life. For the child of God, even necessities like *food and clothing* are nothing to worry about. Have you been worried about food in the midst of the corona virus outbreak? I know I have. I've been worried about what we'll eat if the supermarkets run out of food. This is a sin. Sure, the Bible commands me to be diligent, and indeed I should take necessary precautions to prepare, but beyond that, being anxious and worried is a sin.

Jesus taught our Heavenly Father knows our needs and cares. If God manages trivialities like grass, flowers, and birds, won't he care for people who are created in his image, for his children? Rather than worry about what we can't control, we should "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things [the necessities of life] will be added to you" (Matt. 6:33). Placing God first is a cure for anxiety.³

In the end however, it all comes down to *you* remembering what God wants you to remember.

[Why does God, throughout the Bible, constantly make a "fuss" about remembering what he has said and done?]

² Even *Jesus* himself was very clear to his would-be followers, that following him would not be easy. See (Luke 9:57--62).

³ Quoted from <https://www.gotquestions.org/Bible-anxiety.html>

We forget *easily*. Do you know what question Jesus asks people most frequently in the Gospels? “Have you not read?”

Matt. 12:3 He said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, and those who were with him:

Matt. 12:5 Or have you not read in the Law how on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath and are guiltless?

Matt. 19:4 He answered, "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female,

Matt. 22:31 And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God:

Mark 12:10 Have you not read this Scripture: "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone;

Mark 12:26 And as for the dead being raised, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the passage about the bush, how God spoke to him, saying, 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'?

Luke 6:3 And Jesus answered them, "Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him:

These “have you not read” questions were rhetorical. Jesus wasn’t really wondering if they had read. He knew they had. The Jews were very religious and were constantly hearing the Bible being read at synagogues. The problem was that they were not remembering, believing, nor applying what the Bible taught. The Jews were not internalizing what they had read. We have the same problem. That’s one of the main reasons why we’re anxious. So, let’s review and *remind* ourselves what the Bible says about worry and anxiety so that Jesus doesn’t have to ask us: “Have you not read?”

We can count on the Lord to provide for our needs, protect us from evil, guide us, and keep our souls secure for eternity. Does this mean that if we just have enough faith, anxious thoughts will never enter our mind? Of course not!

[Discussion: If we can't negative thoughts from entering our mind, what can we do?]

We can't stop negative thoughts from entering our minds, but we can choose how we react. We can practice our response.

[Discussion: What are some different reactions to anxiety?]

Philippians 4:6 instructs us to "not be anxious about anything, but **in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.**

The promised result is in the next verse: **And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."**

When anxious and worrying thoughts enter your mind, be diligent, by prayer, by petition, and with thanksgiving [you always have things to be thankful for], make your requests known to God. Transferring anxiety and worry onto God’s shoulders is the right, effective, correct response. He has

promised to deal with it, so why not ask?

But is this how we usually react? No, it's not. At least in my own personal case, often when I find myself in a trial, my first reaction is to handle it myself. Then, and only then, if it looks like I can't deal with the situation, or once I've done everything I can do, I might pick up the phone and dial my father, God. But this is wrong, I have it in reverse! My *first* reaction should be to get God involved. Then, through prayer, asking him for strength and wisdom to do what I can diligently do. Beyond that, the problem is God's to resolve and at that point, there really isn't anything for me to be anxious or worrying about, unless I think God can't or is not willing to do what he has promised to do.

Remember, remember, remember

My fellow worried, anxious, depressed, Christian, remember that God's plan is to make you more like Jesus. In most cases, that will not be easy. It's not easy placing God above your desires. Jesus promises his followers a weird, hard life by worldly standards.⁴ This coronavirus might not even end up being your toughest trial. However, you have a great advantage. You are not most people. You are a child of God!

It's understandable for unbelievers to be worried and anxious since they don't have God. He is not protecting them and when they die they'll be separated from him forever. However, when everyone is reminded how fleeting and fragile life is, we can be unwavering in our belief! We pray for what we think is right, but trust God to do what he knows is best, for his glory and our eternal benefit.

What peace you can have knowing this truth, that every single trial in your life is somehow for your eternal benefit, even if it contradicts your immediate desires. Someway, somehow, each and every trial has been customized for your eternal glory, and one day, in this life or the next, you will understand their benefit, for your eternal joy! In the meanwhile, you may not like your trials (that's why they are called trials), nor even understand them, but you don't have to. Instead of trusting how feel, or how things look, trust that God knows better than you. *Remember* who God is. He is all good, and all powerful, working for his glory and your benefit, no matter what comes next. Remember that.

Throughout the Old Testament, God's constant plea to His people was: Remember who I am! Remember my promises! Remember what I've done for you! Remember how I brought you out of Egypt, remember how I brought you to the land of Canaan, remember how I delivered you from Babylonian captivity. Remember to whom you belong! Remember who is in control!

In the New Testament Jesus constantly asked: "Have you not read?" Right now, in the midst of your troubles, God is asking *you*: "Have you not read"? Have you not read that he chose you, died for you, saved you, and loves you? Do you understand, do you really understand, that when he looks at you, he sees his precious child, made clean and perfect by the blood of Christ?

In your anxiety and worry, don't you think God has forgotten you or doesn't care about you, for whom he literally died to adopt you into his family.

The problem is not that God has forgotten about you. The problem is that *you* often forget what kind of

⁴ See *supra* note 2.

God you have. When those thoughts of worry are attacking you or when your negative feelings stir you, you can believe the lies in your mind or choose to remember what your father, God, has said and done!

Preach these gospel truths to yourself Christian! They do not depend upon your feelings but, upon God. He is in control and has promised never to let you go until his work on you is finished. He determined the day you were born and he has predetermined the day and the very second you will die. Until that moment, when he brings you home, where you belong, with him, for all eternity, you are untouchable. You might have wondered recently about your chances of dying if you catch the coronavirus. Your chances of dying upon catching it are exactly the same if you hadn't caught it. God's in control of your life (Job 14:5), not a virus nor any other calamity.⁵ Remember these glorious truths and let God's supernatural peace rest upon you richly!

Sources, inspiration, and further reading

I made this document as a study guide for a small bible study group that I host. Feel free to use this document in your own group studies, but kindly provide a link back to this page:

www.ReformedPreacher.com

Below are the main sources and inspiration for this study:

<https://www.gotquestions.org/Bible-anxiety.html>

<https://adam4d.com/things-helped-anxiety/>

<https://www.gotquestions.org/Bible-stress.html>

<https://www.gotquestions.org/Bible-worry.html>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0osq6PSrMek> (Matt Chandler: Nobody Dies Early)

<https://youtu.be/86dsfBbZfWs?t=44> (The Rope Illustration)

⁵ As Pastor Miguel Nunez, who is also a medical doctor, has aptly put it.