

Are you stressed out or anxious? Then join the club. Anxiety is one of the defining symptoms of our times. Anxiety disorders affect 40 million adults in the U.S., a little over 18% of our population. Colleges report that the rates of anxiety among students is higher than ever. Younger children are being diagnosed with anxiety. Seeing the people love dealing with anxiety can increase our own. So what should we do? How do you deal with anxiety?

When Shawn Baker was laid off in 2015, she opened a new business called “Tantrums” that became a “smash hit.” It is a place for angry, stressed out, anxious people to take out their frustrations on inanimate objects. She has rooms filled with old furniture, dishes, TV’s, out of date appliances and feather pillows that she buys from junk dealers and used furniture shops. Customers from all walks of life put on safety gear, choose their own weapon before closing themselves in a room and smashing everything in sight. After the 5 to 15 minute session the room looks like a war zone. While it may be better to bash an old microwave than taking our emotions out on others, the idea that we can bash our anxiety away doesn’t work. We need God’s gift of peace to deal with the stress and anxiety of life.

If we want to overcome anxiety, it helps to know where it comes from. So let me ask you a question, “Who or what are you listening too?” The people or the other sources we listen to can have a big influence on our lives. I think they should re-name our news broadcast. They should be called “Bad News.” It seems like local news always begins with “Bad News.” An old saying in the world of media is “If it bleeds it leads.” Cable news is no better. We shouldn’t be like an ostrich and bury our heads in the sand, but we don’t need to watch or listen to the same bad news over and over again?

Many politicians use anxiety as a motivator to get us to vote for them. They tell us about all of the terrible things that will happen if we don’t support them and the other guy gets elected. Fear mongers tells us the stock market or the economy are going to crash, the climate is going to become so bad that life as we know it won’t exist and that we need to join ever class action law suit out there because we may have been exposed to something dangerous.

If you want to reduce the anxiety in your life, you can begin by paying more attention to God and His Word. Proverbs (4:20-22 NLT) tells us, “**My child, pay attention to what I say. Listen carefully to my words. Don’t lose sight of them. Let them penetrate deep into your heart, for they bring life to those who find them, and healing to their whole body.**” When we listen to God and His word, we are given the promise of help, hope and peace. God tells us that nothing can separate us from His love and that God has the power to work everything out in the long run for our good. He tells us not to worry about losing the stuff we have in this life that doesn’t last when His love lasts forever.

Another question we need to ask ourselves is “Where are you living?” Are you living in the past, the present or the future? Where is your focus in life? If you are living your life looking in the rear view mirror, you are trying to live in the past. But you can’t change the past. You can undo the things that you did to make them better. We are giving life one day at a time. Jesus warns us about the dangers of worrying about the future. So many things that we worry about never happen. Jesus tells us, **“So don’t worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today’s trouble is enough for today.”** (Matthew 6:34 NLT) We can’t change the past. It doesn’t do us any good to worry about the future. With the Lord’s help we can face one day at a time, trusting in His love and guidance.

The next question is “What are you thinking about?” Are you thinking about good things or bad things? Are you thinking about what might go wrong or about the good things God gives us in life? The Apostle Paul tells us, **“Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise.”** (Philippians 4:8 NLT) Maybe we should print this verse on the back of our TV remotes or put in on our computers, tablets and smart phones. God want us to fill our thoughts with His truth so that we learn to look at life from His perspective.

The story is told about a long flight when the pilot came over the speaker and asked everyone to put on their seat belts because they were expecting turbulence. They got turbulence as they flew threw a storm. Everyone was terrified except for one passenger; a little girl who sat curled up in her seat reading a book. After the plane cleared the storm and landed safely, a man asked the little girl why she didn’t worry. She answered, “My daddy’s the pilot. He’s taking me home. I didn’t worry because I knew he was in the cockpit.” In the midst of the storms in our lives, we need to think about who is at the controls. We can rest secure in Jesus Christ as He takes us home. God gives us this promise in Isaiah (26:3 NLT), **“You will keep in perfect peace all who trust in you, all whose thoughts are fixed on you!”**

The next question is “Are you praying?” Jesus went off by himself before and after major events in His life. He prayed before selecting His Disciples and before His arrest. He prayed after the death of John the Baptist and feeding the 5,000. Since Jesus prayed to find help to deal with things in His life, shouldn’t we pray too? Prayer for the Christian should not be a last resort. It should be an ongoing conversation with God the Father. The Apostle Paul wrote, **“Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God’s peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.”** (Philippians 4:6-7 NLT)

To many people think that peace is the removal of trouble rather than a way of living joyfully and worry free despite our troubles. When the pressures of life come crashing in, too many people go looking for an escape. But escapes don't last. Jesus tells us, "I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world." (John 6:33 NLT) And He gives us this promise, "I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don't be troubled or afraid." (John 14:27 NLT)

When we have the Peace of God and are living at Peace with God, He can help us hold our ground and overcome anxiety. A final promise from Paul. "Now may the Lord of peace himself give you his peace at all times and in every situation. The Lord be with you all." (2 Thessalonians 3:16 NLT)