

# We're All Freaking Out

*(and Why We Don't Need To)*



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ONLY**

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*Finding Freedom from Your  
Anxious Thoughts and Feelings*

# David Marvin

PRAISE FOR

## *We're All Freaking Out* (and Why We Don't Need To)

“David’s words are like a much-needed road map in a time of deep confusion, fog, and anxiety. I’m thankful for David being the guide we need.”

—JEFFERSON BETHKE, *New York Times* bestselling author of  
*Take Back Your Family*

“These pages will feel like a lifeline for the anxious, overwhelmed, and burned out. David is one of the greatest shepherds of people I know, and this book is timely as we rebuild our lives.”

—JENNIE ALLEN, *New York Times* bestselling author of  
*Get Out of Your Head* and founder and visionary of IF:Gathering

“David is deeply acquainted with the greatest needs and struggles of the next generation. Prepare to be challenged and then comforted while laughing along the way.”

—TIMOTHY ATEEK, executive director of Breakaway Ministries

“I have personally benefitted from David’s wisdom as it relates to anxiety. If you suffer from worry, anxiety, panic attacks, or freaking out, he will be an expert guide to the peace and calm that can only be found in Jesus.”

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*Welcome to Adulthood* and *Outdated*

“David pairs lighthearted relatability with profound biblical wisdom to offer a practical guide for alleviating the anxiety that plagues us. *We’re All Freaking Out* is an invaluable tool to help stop toxic thoughts before they send us into a spiral of despair.”

—ALLIE BETH STUCKEY, author of  
*You’re Not Enough (and That’s Okay)* and host of *Relatable*

“This book provides a timely, needed, and practical strategy for each of us to face the current epidemic of anxiety head on.”

—BRAD LOMENICK, past president of Catalyst and author of  
*H3 Leadership* and *The Catalyst Leader*

“*We’re All Freaking Out* is a masterpiece—art for your soul. Through compelling stories and helpful tips, you will be encouraged and equipped to rest your worries with our God.”

—JARED C. WILSON, bestselling author of  
*The Imperfect Disciple* and *Love Me Anyway*

“In this book, David Marvin is hilariously funny and yet deadly serious. If you find yourself freaking out (which is all of us), this book shows you why you don’t need to.”

—KYLE IDLEMAN, bestselling author of  
*Not a Fan* and *One at a Time*

“*We’re All Freaking Out* is an outstanding book that points your anxieties back to Scripture. This is a must-read for anyone navigating the struggles in wanting to break free from anxious thoughts.”

—JOE WHITE, CEO of Kanakuk Kamps

“Anxiety and worry are two of the most common reasons people come to our counseling practice. David Marvin has done a wonderful job describing what fear looks like, why it develops, and how we can tackle it by resting in Truth.”

—DR. STEVEN K. LYTLE, licensed psychologist and  
founding partner of Sparrow House Counseling

“In a world full of distractions where priorities, passions, and pursuits can be driven out of the brokenness in our lives, David reminds us that success and fulfillment can be found in this life if you know where to look.”

—SHANE EVERETT, *Shane & Shane*

“One might consider that a pastor teaching on anxiety is suspect, but rest assured, David Marvin’s better half is a Christian counselor. She has aptly influenced his counsel for you.”

—CALEB KALTENBACH, bestselling author of  
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“No one can talk you out of anxiety, but some may so clearly depict the natural angst of life that we can navigate it more surely. David Marvin does just that. As a man in ministry who works with people and their struggles, David hits the nail on the head.”

—TOMMY NELSON, senior pastor of Denton Bible Church

“I have watched David counsel and pastor young adults for more than a decade, and this book is only another way he will help more young people live a life of freedom.”

—SHANE BARNARD, singer in the award-winning worship duo  
*Shane & Shane*, worship leader at Watermark Community  
Church, and cofounder of the Worship Initiative

“David Marvin possesses wisdom, clarity, and a keen insight into the lives of the young professionals he serves. You will be well served by this incredible resource.”

—BEN STUART, pastor of Passion City Church DC,  
author of *Single, Dating, Engaged, Married*



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Finding Freedom from Your  
Anxious Thoughts and Feelings

David Marvin



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To the one who always points me to Jesus when I'm freaking out,  
who transformed how I think about anxiety,  
and who is the love of my life: Calli Rae Marvin.



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## Introduction

# *We're All Freaking Out*

I was only a day into being married and I was freaking out. Our wedding had gone off without a hitch: my wife looked beautiful, vows were made, family and friends celebrated with us at the reception, and everything was amazing.

But waking up the next morning beside my new wife, there was something I didn't expect to be there: anxiety. A lot of it. Not anxiety about whether I'd made a mistake getting married or regarding whom I married. Those I had no concerns over. I was panicking about something entirely different: the honeymoon.

The honeymoon was my primary contribution to our wedding planning, and I had made sure the place I chose would not disappoint. So I broke the bank to set up the best honeymoon possible.

I booked us eight days at a secluded boutique-style beach resort out of the country, where pampering and luxury were guaranteed: couples massages on the beach, a sunset cruise on a yacht, rose petals in the bathtub each night, a twelve-hundred-square-foot room with our own private pool, and service to the nines. We were going to a hotel that prized itself on seclusion, quiet, and relaxation.

We were hours from experiencing all this lavishness, and what flooded my mind wasn't excitement; it was panic. *Why?*

Well, I am what people would call an extra extrovert. Being alone

is not a perk to me. In the words of Ariel from Disney's *The Little Mermaid*, "I want to be where the people are."<sup>1</sup> I'm also someone who doesn't relax well and, honestly, doesn't really like to try to. I don't even enjoy massages. I like adventure and having things to do, and I hate being bored.

As I lay beside my beautiful new wife, I realized I had booked us a honeymoon at my own worst nightmare. *What the heck are we going to do for eight whole days?* kept playing in my mind.

So I did what you do when you're anxious: I reached for something to give me a sense of control. The next morning, I went to a local bookstore and bought twelve books. *Twelve books!* In hindsight, I am not sure why. Maybe I thought, *I'll just make this an educational trip.* I also downloaded movies and TV shows to my computer. I called my cell phone carrier and purchased an international data plan for my phone. I tried to plan and schedule things to accomplish while on the beach.

None of which helped.

My new wife could soon tell there was something on my mind. When she asked me what was wrong, I told her I thought I was having a panic attack.

But I still couldn't stop thinking, *What the heck are we going to do for eight days on the beach?* Not exactly the conversation a girl dreams of having with her new husband.

The trip came and those eight days were some of the most incredible of my life. To this day, my wife and I talk about how amazing our honeymoon was. We also look back and laugh at how crazy it was for me to be so anxious. It was my *honeymoon*, for goodness' sake.

The truth is, being anxious about a honeymoon is crazy—not just because it was a *honeymoon*, but because anxiety is always irrational. Let me explain before you write me off or think I'm insulting you.

Being anxious is normal and understandable, *but it's not rational.*

Freaking out about the future doesn't change the future; it just makes you more miserable in the present. That is why I say it's not

rational. Think about it. Dwelling on anxious thoughts is not helpful to ourselves, those around us, or our circumstances. It adds nothing and only takes away. Why would we keep doing this?

Ironically, being told or even believing that being anxious doesn't help does nothing to help us not be anxious. We are anxious not because we believe it helps but because *we don't know how not to be*.

### **Anxiety Beyond Understanding?**

People saying, "Don't be anxious," when we are anxious is like saying, "Just fall asleep," to someone struggling to fall asleep at night. It doesn't help. If we could just stop, we would.

But the Bible promises that we can experience a peace that "surpasses all understanding" (Philippians 4:7, *ESV*)—a peace greater than our ability to explain or put into words. If that is promised, why do we rarely feel that peace? For most of us, the opposite is true: we experience *anxiety* that goes beyond understanding.

We get stuck in moments, or even seasons, of crippling fear and worry that we can't explain and find hard to express to others. We experience anxious feelings that paralyze us, keep us from sleeping, rob us of our ability to be present with friends, and just suck the life out of us.

Scripture also refers to God keeping in perfect peace those who look to him (see Isaiah 26:3, *NLT*). We think, *Really? In perfect peace? Is that even possible?* It doesn't seem so. Not many people I know live in perfect peace. For most of us, it's an imperfect peace, at best. More often our experience is closer to "in constant fear" or "with alarming anxiousness" or "weighed down by worry" or "so nervous I have no nails left to bite."

But as we will see, for believers in Christ, this doesn't have to be the case for much, if not all, of our anxiety. I don't say Christians can always be free from all anxiety at all times, because that is often not the case. Anxiety forms as a result of one or more of three underlying types of reasons: physiological, psychological, and spiritual. While most often the causes are psychological and spiritual, there

are times when something physiological is going on. When someone says, “I have anxiety,” it’s like someone saying, “I have a problem with my computer.” In the case of the computer, there’s a problem with either the software (maybe a software update is needed or there’s a virus) or the hardware (the physical components, like the keyboard).

When it comes to dealing with anxiety, there are times the problem is spiritual or psychological (our “software”), and other times when something physiological (our “hardware”) is going on—for example, a hormonal imbalance or serotonin deficiency. In these pages, we will explore God’s plan for dealing with the spiritual and psychological factors behind our anxiety. If the root cause of your anxiety is physiological, you can still learn plenty from this book, yet I encourage you to seek a qualified medical doctor to fully attend to your situation. And although I touch on the topic of medication in the FAQ section, I recommend consulting with a physician, therapist, or other qualified individual before deciding if it’s right for you.

Thankfully, for most of us, the bulk of our anxiety issues involves our psychology (personality and experiences) and spiritual life (walking in relationship with God in a sinful world). So that will be our focus in this book.

## What’s in a Name?

One of the biggest challenges of writing this particular book is the different meanings people have associated with words like *anxiety*, *fear*, and *worry*. Then throw in terms like *nervousness*, *panic attack*, and *anxiety disorder* (not to mention *losing it*, *freaking out*, and *flipping out*), and the waters get even muddier.

The word translated in the Bible as “being worried” is also translated as “being anxious.” So, while the Bible does not distinguish between being worried and being anxious, that does not mean there is no such thing as clinical anxiety or generalized anxiety disorders. I discuss both and more in the FAQ section.

But the word the Bible uses most often for anxiety, worry, and

anxiousness is the Greek term *merimnao*, which means “dwelling on or pondering fearful or anxious thoughts.” According to pastor and professor Bill Klein, “In ancient Greek literature, it is used to convey the concept of meditation.”<sup>2</sup>

When the Bible says, “Do not be anxious” in Philippians 4:6, it is *not* saying, “Don’t have anxious thoughts.” That’s impossible. We can’t just *not have* those thoughts. Rather, it’s saying, “Do not *meditate* or  *dwell* on those anxious thoughts.” That *is* possible; we *can* choose not to continue ruminating on anxious thoughts. Think of it like this: you may not be able to stop some burglar from bursting into your house, but you can choose not to invite him to sit down and stay awhile.

*Do not meditate on anxious thoughts.* Who would disagree with that? I’m sure you’ve never heard someone say, “Here’s what really helped turn my life around: I began every morning meditating on fear, trying to play out every anxious thought about what could happen that day. It fixed all my problems!” No, that’s nuts.

So, the definition I’ll use for being worried and anxious is “dwelling on anxious and fearful feelings and thoughts about future or potential problems.”

## The Struggle Is Real

If you’ve struggled with anxiety, fear, or worry, you are not alone. If you haven’t, you don’t live on Planet Earth and I’m not sure how you got hold of this book. The truth is, everyone gets anxious. I think I can go a step further and say that everyone has moments better described as “freaking out”—those times when panic, fear, worry, or anxiety overwhelms us. It’s part of life for most of us, and a *way of life* for some of us.

According to the Anxiety and Depression Association of America, anxiety disorders have reached epidemic levels, affecting forty million adults age eighteen and older just in the United States alone.<sup>3</sup>

In fact, in 2019, the American Psychiatric Association found

that two in three Americans said they were anxious, and “nearly one in three adults (32%) say they are more anxious than they were last year.”<sup>4</sup> That means for *most* of us, the struggle is real. And research shows that younger adults are more anxious than older ones. “About 70% of adults 18 to 34 years are somewhat or extremely anxious about paying bills or keeping their family safe.”<sup>5</sup> In fact, millennials and Generation Z have the highest levels of anxiety.<sup>6</sup>

Adults today are between two and three times more likely than people of previous generations to experience depression,<sup>7</sup> which is often caused by prolonged anxiety. Overdose deaths for medications such as Xanax, Librium, Valium, and Ativan—which are commonly prescribed to treat anxiety, phobias, panic attacks, insomnia, and more—have quadrupled in the past twenty years, according to the National Institute on Drug Abuse.<sup>8</sup> And this was *before* the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, which caused even more anxiety, more panic attacks, and a sharp increase in the use of anti-anxiety medication.<sup>9</sup>

### It’s Getting Worse

It doesn’t seem like anxiety is going away anytime soon. It actually appears to be getting worse and influencing us earlier in life. One study found that “the average high school kid today has the same level of anxiety as the average psychiatric patient in the early 1950’s.”<sup>10</sup> That’s crazy! Or maybe, according to people who lived in that decade, *we* are crazy.

Why is the problem growing worse? There are many potential reasons, but one is the rapid cultural transformation of recent decades. Some researchers suggest that the Western world’s “environment and social order have changed more in the last thirty years than they have in the previous three hundred.”<sup>11</sup> And that research was published in 2010! Before Instagram, iPads, Amazon’s Alexa, Netflix originals, Uber, DoorDash, and more have further transformed our world. It’s no wonder people are freaking out: change is stressful!

The explosion in popularity of smartphones is a clear example. These devices changed much more than how we talk on the phone. They are portable computers that constantly bombard us with massive amounts of information, some of which is helpful, some interesting, and some a total waste of time (like those cat videos your aunt sends).

Think about how much we have flooding our attention, thanks to smartphones, that no one in history previously had the blessing or burden of carrying. If there is something to get anxious over, that little computer in your pocket is *it*. Want to worry about threats of pandemics, global warming, terrorist attacks, mounting national debt, foreign dictatorships, and more? Just set a news alert. Need more relational drama in your life? There's an app for that. Download and turn on notifications to get the latest intel on pop-culture drama, such as which celebrity is breaking up with which other celebrity.

On top of that, social media provides access to a world of distraction, discontentment, and maybe even depression. From tweets fueling the latest-trending controversy to Instagram posts feeding envy—not to mention the never-ending barrage of emails and text messages—it's surprising we can ever get a break.

Life seems to be moving faster than ever, and it's virtually impossible to catch our breath. When we stop and think about it, the enormous spikes in anxiety make total sense.

## Young and Anxious

Anxiety can be a part of our lives regardless of our age, but it is now especially prevalent in the young-adult years, between ages eighteen and thirty-five. It's a unique time because we must make decisions that dramatically shape the direction of our lives. That means pressure! One study found that “80% of life's most significant events take place by about age 35.”<sup>12</sup>

In young adulthood, you are often deciding whom to marry, what career path to take, and so many other things that affect your future,



all without clear guidelines on how to make those life-altering decisions.

This is dramatically different from our lives as kids. Remember when the biggest decisions you had to make were which Lunchables to take to school and whether you should listen to Spotify or Apple Music? Life used to be so simple.

Up until young adulthood, there are pretty clear tracks to run on: When you finish elementary school, you go to middle school. When you finish middle school, you go to high school. When you finish high school, you go to college. In college, there's freshman year, then sophomore year, then junior year, then senior year, then sometimes another senior year for a victory lap. But after that, it's as if the tracks run out right as you approach a bridge. And life can feel like the derailed train free-falling through the air:

- *Am I in the right career?*
- *Is this person “the one”?*
- *Where am I going to live?*
- *How am I going to pay off my student loans?*
- *How am I going to afford health insurance?*

An endless number of uncertainties arise.

On top of that, many young adults are walking through these years alone. Over the past forty years, the average age of first-time marriage has gone from twenty-four to thirty for men and from twenty-two to twenty-eight for women.<sup>13</sup> Previously, young adults were at least walking through this time in their lives with a spouse, but these days they are more likely to be single during these defining decision-making years.

Yes, we have numerous tools at hand for digital connection to family, friends, and coworkers, but truly meaningful relationships aren't quite as common. In fact, only one in three young adults (ages eighteen to thirty-five) “often feel deeply cared for by those around them (33%) or that someone believes in them (32%).”<sup>14</sup>

The uncertainty of life and the loneliness of facing it on our own typically heighten anxiety. The young-adult life stage is basically a natural period for anxiousness, fear, and worry. But as we will see, it doesn't have to be.

### **There, I Said It**

Tragically, the church has often failed in helpfully addressing the issue of anxiety, with such ineffective banalities as “If you just had more faith, you would not be anxious” or similar platitudes that only cause the anxious person to feel shame on top of his or her feelings of anxiety. Think about how ridiculous this is. When was the last (or first) time you heard someone say, “You know what cured my anxiety? Shame”? Yeah, *never*.

There is more to the battle of anxiety than just having more faith. In fact, some of the *godliest* people I know *struggle with anxiety* currently or have in the past, and some of the *least anxious* people are the most *ungodly*. Simply suggesting that people with anxiety just ramp up their faith is not only unhelpful but also insulting.

That is *not* to say that we shouldn't be pointing people to God's Word for help and guidance as a first line of defense. There is life-changing wisdom, comfort, and guidance in the Bible that should be offered to those who struggle. We'll talk about this in greater detail throughout the book.

Yet often our reaction when someone struggles with anxiety is to immediately push him or her to see a counselor or psychiatrist outside the church for help. Don't get me wrong; those are wonderful professions and are appropriate and even necessary at times. Don't believe me? I am married to a licensed professional counselor who has for the past decade worked primarily with young adults who struggle with anxiety. If I didn't support counseling, things would be pretty awkward at home.

The counseling profession is important. I have personally gone to counseling and found it incredibly helpful. But as my wife and thousands of counselors would agree, God's Word should be our first line

of defense against anxiety. Taking the step to see a counselor should not exclude putting into practice the principles God gives us for dealing with anxiety, fear, panic, and worry. Professional counseling is a good supplement to God's Word, but it is not a replacement.

### **Yeah . . . That's Not What the Bible Says**

Why do people ignore what the Bible says about anxiety? In my experience, it is almost always because they misunderstand what the Bible teaches as it relates to anxiety, which leads them to see its teachings as irrelevant and outdated on this topic.

If you were to ask the average Christian, "What does the Bible teach about anxiety and worry?" my guess is you would get answers like, "It says to stop" or "It says don't worry; just pray" or "Don't be anxious; you just need to trust God."

All those statements are . . . well . . . kind of true, but not entirely.

The teachings throughout Scripture are far more helpful and practical than simply "Stop being anxious." Like I said, telling people to just stop being anxious doesn't work. If they could "just stop," they would have already.

The Bible gives us real tools that can truly help us fight anxiety, fear, and worry. God gave us these tools thousands of years ago, and—as we'll learn—science and psychology are still catching up.

In the chapters ahead, we will explore what the Bible actually teaches and how to put the principles into practice in a way that allows us to experience real peace.

How does that sound? Pretty good, right? I truly believe our lives will be transformed as we learn what God has to say about anxiety and how to apply his truth to our lives.

### **What This Book *Is Not***

Before moving forward, let me make clear what this book is *not*.

This book is not a substitute for counseling, nor is it a one-stop shop to immediately fix every anxiety disorder, every panic disorder, every post-traumatic stress disorder, and every expression of anxiety.

This book is definitely *not* to shame people who have anxiety. Christians who are able to better control their anxious thoughts can sometimes make those of us who struggle with anxiety ashamed and even more anxious. I promise you won't get that here.

This book is *not* anti-psychology. Psychology is not God, but when applied and practiced correctly, it *is* a gift from God. Like all medical fields can inform us about various aspects of our physical bodies, psychology gives us greater glimpses into how our minds work and how to retrain our thinking and thus change our feelings.

### What This Book Is

Over the past ten years, I have worked as a pastor at the Porch, a young-adult ministry in Dallas, Texas, that brings in thousands of people every week to worship, with many more joining us via satellite locations around America. This role has allowed me to work directly with tens of thousands of young men and women. I have seen up close the dramatic spike in anxiety, panic attacks, and worry and what effect those are having on their lives. Many of these young adults were raised in church and became Christians at a young age but never understood what the Bible teaches or how to put what it says into practice.

As a result of what I was observing, I began to prioritize teaching principles from the Bible to provide a strategy for what to do when anxiety strikes. Consider this book that strategy. We will walk through how to identify your anxiety and what is fueling it. Then we will examine the tools God offers to help us experience peace, learning exactly how to use them in our lives. We will also explore the most common areas that are sources of anxiety among young adults: romantic anxiety, career anxiety, financial anxiety, and personal anxiety (a.k.a. insecurity anxiety).

You are about to discover why *you* don't have to freak out, even if everyone else is.

~~~~~

## The Bible's Most Repeated Command

God's Word has a lot to say about fear, anxiety, and worry. In fact, the most repeated command in all of Scripture is "Fear not." Think about that. God tells us not to fear more than he tells us not to murder, commit adultery, or steal. God tells us not to fear more than he tells us to pray or love our neighbor. At least 366 times, we are commanded in the Bible not to give way to fear. That is once for every day of the year, even on a leap year. It is clear God does not want us to experience lives owned by fear.

None of us wants to live imprisoned by fear, anxiety, and worry. I have met with thousands of people, and never once have I heard someone say, "I am willing to give God all of my life, just not my anxiety. That I want to keep and enjoy for myself." I may not know you personally, but I'm certain that if there were an "eliminate anxiety" button, you would push it.

The problem is not that we are unwilling to let go of our anxiety; it's that we don't know how. In this book, we're going to discover how. Hope will come as you keep turning the pages.

God loves you and doesn't want you to be ruled by anxiety and fear. He invites all of us into lives marked by his peace instead of our panic and tells us how to get there.

Are you ready to begin?



# Part I

## *Why We Freak Out*

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## *The Fog of Fear*

### Identifying the Reasons We're Anxious

I have yard envy. I had to confess before we continue. Yes, I know I sound like the grumpy old guy who yells, “Stay off my lawn!” at little kids, but hear me out. I live next door to a family that should win an award for how well they keep their lawn. It’s always lush and full. I would be lying if I said I hadn’t entertained doing a picnic over there.

My lawn, on the other hand, is patchy with lots of spots where the grass has died, even though it gets plenty of water. The problem is that it’s full of weeds. My yard looks like a bald dude who’s using Rogaine to try to grow hair but it’s coming in kind of wild and irregular in a few random spots around his head. I don’t know why, but I am *amazing* at growing weeds but *awful* at growing grass.

Every spring is another season of trying to remove weeds and grow grass. Years of doing this has given me a bad back and a PhD in weed removal. I’ve learned that if you don’t remove the weeds, they will choke out the grass around them. They quite literally suck the life out of your lawn. And unless you pull the weeds out by their roots, you *still* have weeds. You think you’ve removed them, but they have *not* gone away and will keep growing.

Sometimes when I’m out in my yard—crying, or lying defeated in a dirt patch, or thinking about how if I torched my neighbor’s yard mine wouldn’t look so bad anymore—I realize those weeds are



a picture of the anxiety and worry in our lives. If we don't deal with them, they choke the life out of us. In fact, the origin of the word *worry* in English comes from an old German word meaning "to strangle or choke." Worry and anxiety strangle us mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and even physically.

Also, like weeds, if anxiety is not addressed at its roots, it isn't going away. We might think we've removed it, but then we'll discover we haven't, and it will continue choking the life out of us. The roots of the weeds in our lawn are underground. And, like weeds, the roots of our anxiety are also beneath the surface . . . of our minds and hearts.

Good news: it is possible to remove weeds in your lawn, and it is possible to remove the anxious feelings in your heart. Like getting rid of weeds, it's not easy, but you can do it.

## Jedi Jesus

What do you think Jesus preached about when he gave a sermon? Remember, it was two thousand years ago, so he probably wasn't warning of the dangers of dating apps, Zoom fatigue, or Netflix and chilling.

We have some of Jesus's preaching recorded in the Bible, including his most famous talk, called the Sermon on the Mount, because he delivers it from a mountainside.

In this teaching, Jesus addresses the topic of . . . anxiety. Imagine that. I guess people have been anxious for a long time!

In the chapters ahead, we will explore more of Jesus's teaching on anxiety. For now, I want to focus on a few penetrating questions he asks his audience in the Sermon on the Mount. I think we'll find they are still relevant to our anxiety today.

Jesus says,

I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. (Matthew 6:25)

Jesus covers what his audience would have worried about: food and clothing.

In that day, there wasn't a local grocery store or a fridge full of food. Chick-fil-A was not open on Sundays, and . . . well, it was *never* open back then. Restaurants didn't exist. You got up every morning hoping you'd have enough to eat that day.

There also wasn't mass production of clothing. Most folks had one or two outfits total. They couldn't go buy a new outfit at the mall, because there were no malls! Anxiety about "What if we run out of food?" or "What if our clothes wear out and we can't afford to replace them?" was real.

But Jesus says, "Don't worry about that." Whatever you are stressed about, he would tell you not to spend time worrying about it. More on why ahead, but let's take a look at a genius question he asks next:

Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes?

Let me pause before going on. Why do you think Jesus asks that question? Is he looking for an answer or being rhetorical? Since he is Jesus—and, you know, *God*—it's safe to assume he knows the answer. Jesus wants to force his audience to put the objects of their worries into a bigger perspective. He was the original Jedi-mind-trick master.

He is basically saying, *Hey, guys, does food equal life? That's all life is about? If you had all the food you needed for the rest of your days, would that be like the best thing ever? Really? Is the point of life really acquiring food?*

His audience would have known, *Of course food doesn't equal life. Food is important, but life is not equal to just food.*

This leads Jesus to ask the logical question of *Then why would you spend so much of your life worried about it?*

Remember, the Bible's definition of worrying or being anxious is not "to have an occasional anxious thought"; it's to dwell on our

anxious thoughts. Jesus is saying, *If there is more to life than food and clothes, why would you give so much of your life to being anxious about them?*

It's his attempt to pull the people back so they can better see the objects of their anxiety. When we are anxious, we get so nearsighted that it's difficult for us to see anything other than the thing we are anxious about.

One reason is because anxiety is amazing at taking something small and inflating it to enormous proportions. Jesus is helping his audience deflate the power of their worries by putting them into perspective.

### **Fog Machine of Fear**

I read once that a dense fog large enough to cover seven city blocks a hundred feet deep is made up of just one glass of water expanded into millions and millions of droplets. *Whaaaaa?* Something so small can expand into something so big.

In the same way, the object of our anxiety is always smaller than the size it grows to in our thoughts. Anxiety operates in our minds like a fog machine with a glass of water, expanding and stretching our fear-filled thoughts as far as we will allow it.

A thought so small like *I am not sure where I am going to live after my roommate moves out* enters the “fog machine of fear” in our minds and gets stretched way out of proportion, with us ending up in a panic. That simple idea can stretch into something like this:

*I am not sure where I am going to live after my roommate moves out. I need to find a roommate to pay half the rent or I can't afford to live here and I'll be kicked to the curb. I don't know anyone looking for a place to live. Maybe I should post something on Craigslist or Facebook to find someone. Great, then I'll end up with a psychopath who murders me in my sleep. Oh no, my op-*

tions are homelessness or being murdered! Either way, my life is over.

Without trying, we end up in a “fog of fear” of our own making. It’s paralyzing and miserable. But remember, enormous fog comes from a *small* amount of water. What if we could see our anxiety as a glass of water rather than the giant fog? Dealing with it would become *much* easier. The good news is, you *can*. Let’s figure out how.

### Anxious for Something

If you are wrestling with anxiety and go see a counselor, he or she will often do what Jesus did. To deflate the power your anxiety is having over you, the counselor will ask you questions that will reveal what you are *actually anxious* about.

Like I said, I am married to a counselor—maybe because God knew I would need round-the-clock therapy, not just occasional help. My wife works primarily with young adults who struggle with anxiety. She (and other therapists) will often do something like the following. (Side note: I am about to give you, for free, what would cost \$120 an hour from a counselor. You’re welcome.)

Suppose someone were seeing a counselor. Let’s call him Kyle. Kyle brings up that he is anxious about some layoffs his company is going through. Here’s how the counselor might try to help him get to the bottom of his fears.

KYLE: My company is downsizing and laying off staff. I am anxious that I may lose my job.

COUNSELOR: Well, what happens if you get laid off?

KYLE: I’d have to find a job quickly or I won’t be able to pay my rent.

COUNSELOR: What happens if you can’t afford to pay your rent?

KYLE: I’d have to move back in with my parents.

COUNSELOR: What happens if you have to move back in with your parents?

KYLE: I'd feel so embarrassed, like I was a failure.

Let me hit pause in this made-up dialogue. (It's my story, so I can pause when I want to.)

What Kyle thinks he is anxious about is losing his job. What he is *actually* anxious about is moving in with his parents and being *seen as a failure*. Of course, moving in with one's parents is *not* the definition of failure. But my point is, he is actually anxious about what people think of him. If he is going to *not* be anxious, he needs to know why he is anxious in the first place.

In order to combat your anxiety, you need to ask yourself, *What am I anxious about, really?* Will that make the problem go away? No. But it will at least let you see what you are actually afraid of. My guess is that it will deflate your anxiety by allowing you to see your fears for what they really are.

More importantly, it's also the first step to dealing with your anxiety.

## You Are Here

I don't like going to the mall. It stresses me out. I feel like I can't breathe. I don't know where the stores are, I struggle to find my way out, and I continually have to fight the temptation to go crouch in the fetal position in some abandoned corner eating an Auntie Anne's pretzel.

To prevent that soul-sucking mall experience, I have mastered the art of online shopping. You'd be amazed at my ability to order everything online just so I don't have to go to the store. Except for one store: the Apple store. Yes, I am an Apple-product guy. (If you are an Android user, know that I am praying for you.)

About once a year, some Apple product of mine needs to be fixed or I find out about some new Apple product I "need," so I head to the mall. I park, go inside, and begin my *Maze Runner* experience. I

start walking through the intricate labyrinth, only to realize I've done it again: I've parked on the completely wrong side of the mall. I begin to think the people who run the mall move the Apple store every few months. (Or I just have no sense of direction and hate malls.)

Because I don't know my way around, I always look for the sign that has the map telling you where everything is. It's like the last physical map left in society. Something about it makes me feel like I am hunting for buried treasure.

When I read the map, I look for two things: Where is the Apple store, and where am I? You know that little star that says, "You are here"? I love that little star! Because in order for me to get to where I want to be, I need to know where I am. Without that little star, the map is useless.

The same is true in our journey to be free (or at least freer) from anxiety. We have to know where we are. We need to admit we are anxious.

Too many of us feel shame over our anxiety and try to pretend it isn't there. That doesn't help. It can actually make us *more* anxious. (Now we're not just anxious; we're also anxious that we're anxious!) And pretending we are not anxious when we are does not mean we are more spiritual; it means we are in denial.

Don't be ashamed of anxious feelings. You cannot change what you will not face. So, *why* are you anxious? What are you worried about? What keeps you awake at night? What are you afraid of?

## The First Step

We are going to develop a plan for what to do once we identify our anxieties, but for now I just want you to be honest with yourself by admitting what you are feeling. Write it out or say it out loud to yourself. The next time you are anxious, chase down your anxiety and face what's beneath it by filling in these blanks: *I am anxious about \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_*. Maybe for you it's one of the following:

- *I am anxious about being single the rest of my life because I am scared to die alone. (That took a morbid turn.)*
- *I am anxious about saying the wrong thing at work because I am afraid of what people may think of me.*
- *I am anxious about getting married because I don't want to end up divorced.*
- *I am anxious about my student loans because they might prevent me from buying a home.*
- *I am anxious that my neighbor's lawn looks like it belongs to some European castle, while mine looks like an abandoned gopher compound, because I'm afraid people will think I'm a loser.*

See how it works? Now it's your turn:

*I am anxious about \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_.*

What are you anxious about, *really*? If you are going to allow it to choke the life out of you, you should at least find out what it is. If you deny or dismiss your anxiety, you will eventually be dominated by it. It's time to face it by first embracing it.

### What Will You Choose to Grow?

Here is something you probably know but have never really thought about. Grass and weeds require the same soil to grow: *dirt*. While you want grass and not weeds, which one grows really depends on you.

In the same way, fear and faith also require the same soil to grow: *uncertainty*. Without uncertainty, fear can't grow, but neither can faith. The same unknowns of the future related to your marriage, job, health, family, and finances provide just as much an opportunity to grow your faith as to grow your fear. Just like with weeds and grass, when it comes to faith and fear, what you grow in the long run depends on you.

If you will begin to uncover the roots of your anxious feelings

and then address them with truths from God's Word, your faith will grow in the very soil in which your fear is present. Why? Because addressing your anxiety with what God's Word says about your worries *is an act of faith*. Faith is like a muscle: the more you use it, the stronger it grows. The inverse is also true: the less you use it, the more it withers away.

So, can you expect to never be anxious again? No more than someone can pluck out all the weeds in their lawn and expect to never see one pop up again. Anxious feelings will likely pop up the rest of your life. You will identify them and go after their roots with God's Word. *Um, sounds great, but how, specifically?* Glad you asked. That's exactly what we're going to cover next!



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*(and Why We Don't Need To)*



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