

The background is a solid teal color. In the center, there is a white, stylized wave with a crest that is breaking into a series of concentric ripples. The wave is rendered with white and light teal brushstrokes, giving it a textured, painterly appearance. The overall composition is centered and balanced.

anxiety and me

*brief biblical
thoughts
to help
anxious
believers*

Guan Yu

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Brief biblical thoughts to help
anxious believers

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A prayer

If you're feeling anxious right now, try praying this prayer. Take your time. Pray it a few times if you need to.

Dear God,
You are good.
Your goodness is bigger than my anxiety.
And so I can be calm.
I can trust in you.
And we can have hope.
Amen.

The rest of this book is about why this prayer is true.

Introduction

My name's Guan and I have an anxiety disorder. That's not usually how I introduce myself at parties, but that's probably because I don't really go to parties, as I usually end up in the corner worrying about who I should talk to.

While this anxiety certainly isn't the only significant thing about me, it seems to be an enduring layer of who I am as a person. There have been times in my life when it's felt like I'm drowning inside my own head; when I've struggled to breathe because of the thoughts swirling like a whirlpool in my mind; when I've looked at the inside of my front door and known it was going to be too difficult to make it out the other side.

Anxiety can manifest in a lot of different ways—a restlessness, a circular worrying or thinking, insomnia, irritability, physical pain, or panic attacks. It is commonly linked with depression, or a generalized over-worrying or obsessive thinking.

If you're someone who doesn't struggle with anxiety (and *does* go to parties), you might ask, "How is anxiety as a disorder different from the general anxiety we feel—when work is stressful, or an exam is coming up?"

To put it simply: doesn't *everyone* have anxiety?

The short answer is yes: everyone will experience anxious periods, points in their lives that are more stressful or difficult, when we're uncertain about the future and what it will bring. Anxiety is a response to perceived danger. And there are points when anxiety is a *good* thing: when I see my child toddling towards a busy road, it's right for my brain to anticipate something going wrong in the future and jolt me into action.

But within that general category of anxiety is what is clinically called an anxiety *disorder*. It's when that anxiety is, in some sense, difficult to control—whether for biological, physiological, psychological, circumstantial, or relational reasons—and may start to interfere with your usual activities. Rather than being an obvious response to genuine danger, disordered anxiety may be a response to perceived danger that is unlikely to result in genuine harm, or is not perceived by others.

Here's an analogy: imagine you're in a car going down the highway—a multi-lane highway full of cars. The traffic is okay, so you're going at a decent speed—fast enough that you wouldn't want to stop suddenly.

Except you can hear something's wrong with the car. You try to change gears, and try again, but you're stuck in first. The car makes a terrible grinding noise

as you try to shift the gearstick. And you can't get it unstuck by sheer force.

An anxiety disorder is a bit like having a broken gearbox. It's often combined with living a life that is going at high speed, or trying to keep up with people in the fast lane. Or it can be caused by something that has gone wrong in the past—like a difficult family background, relationship breakdown, or traumatic circumstances.

From the outside, it may not be obvious that someone has anxiety—that the gearbox is broken. Often, if they keep their foot down on the pedal, they can match speeds with the world around them for a while.

But on the inside, invisible to everyone else, are the grinding gears of anxiety. The motor is revving up to dangerous limits, which means something else might break if you don't find a way to get off the road and get the gearbox working again.

So the difference between this sort of anxiety and the common, everyday anxiety is a bit like the difference between a broken gearbox and the gearstick getting a little stuck as you're changing gears.

The first often requires external help. The second is situational and more fleeting.

I use the word 'anxiety' in this book to describe my own experience of having a moderate anxiety disorder and living day-by-day—and how God's word has helped me to do that. But, naturally, there is some crossover with general anxiety, and with other forms

of anxiety—there are so many grey areas, it's impossible to separate them all completely (at least in a book of this length). And, as we'll see, I believe that what God's word offers is helpful in each of these circumstances—even though anxiety's most extreme forms may not be addressed here.

For the past ten years, I've been trying to think about what it means to have anxiety and to be Christian. And being a Christian wrestling with mental health in the modern world can be confusing, to say the least.

What I found I wanted, as I headed down the road with a broken gearbox, was a way to safely move off the highway. What I wanted in the depths of anxiety was a way to see light again.

And I found it in the psalms—specifically, one of the simplest and shortest of the psalms. I found answers that helped move me away from the edges of anxiety towards the comfort of the Lord.

A quick note: I'm writing this book primarily to those who themselves struggle with anxiety. But I hope it will also be useful to those seeking to understand more about anxiety, perhaps in order to care for those struggling with it.

Additionally, I'm writing this book as a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ for others who are trying to relate their Christian faith to what is going on inside them. If you don't yet know Jesus, I'm hoping this will still be useful to you while also helping you to understand the basis of Christian faith and hope.

A song against anxiety

Not all tools are the same.

Once, I was trying to take the screws out of a children's toy to replace the batteries. The screwdriver I had to hand was a little too big. It *almost* fitted, and would catch for a moment, and I'd try to force it and strip the screw a little bit more, get a bit more frustrated, and then repeat.

When I actually took the time to get up and go and get the right screwdriver for the job, the screws slipped out without a fuss.

This book is not an exhaustive look at every biblical reference to anxiety. If you're anxious, I suspect confronting you with a ream of Bible references would be using the wrong tool.

Rather, in the midst of anxiety, you may be able to

process something small and sharp, rather than something big and monolithic.

And in Psalm 131, one of the shortest psalms in the Bible, we find one of the Bible's shortest, sharpest answers to anxiety:

O LORD, my heart is not lifted up;
my eyes are not raised too high;
I do not occupy myself with things
too great and too marvellous for me.
But I have calmed and quieted my soul,
like a weaned child with its mother;
like a weaned child is my soul within me.

O Israel, hope in the LORD
from this time forth and forevermore.

As you can see, Psalm 131 is just three verses long.

And yet, even though it's small, Psalm 131 contains three movements, one in each verse; three movements that help us move from anxiety towards the truths of the gospel.

In verse 1, God moves our heart from anxiety towards humility.

In verse 2, God moves our self from restlessness towards calm.

In verse 3, God moves our focus from our self towards others.

Let's have a look at verse 1.