

How do I reconcile my Anxiety with my Faith?

If one has anxiety, does that mean one lacks faith? Often Christians are confused by the admonitions of the Scripture to be at peace and not to worry while they face anxiety, worries, and concerns every day. To complicate matters, there are always those who chastise the person feeling worried, for not being full of faith.

Anxiety, like depression, is a misunderstood subject. As a minister for over twenty-five years and as a practicing therapist, I can confirm that a myriad of opinions and false ideas related to anxiety float around the church, as well as the workplace, and home.

The truth is it's a natural human emotion that can work in our favor. The good news is anxiety comes out of a natural human response to challenges and adversity in life, and a certain level of anxiety may help one to remain focused when under stress and even increase one's motivation to take action.

When anxiety is *too high*, one might experience a feeling of dread or apprehension, have trouble concentrating, feel tense or jumpy, think the worst is going to happen, be irritable, feel restlessness, and more. The effects on one's body may look like one's heart is pounding or racing with no apparent cause, stomach upset, fatigue, sweating, dizziness, headaches, an inability to sleep and other similar symptoms.

There are even different types of anxiety: generalized anxiety, "panic attacks," obsessive-compulsive disorder, social anxiety, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and phobias (irrational fears). The last thing a person needs who is struggling with her faith is to feel that she has inferior faith or that in some way she has an inferior experience with God simply because she is experiencing anxiety. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Instead, consider the truth. I refer you to a commonly quoted passage from the New Testament, Matthew 6:25-34, where Jesus admonishes his followers to not worry about the necessities of life. Read it in the context of the chapter and listen to what is being said because He is not telling us not to feel the emotion, nor does he condemn anxiety or having anxiety. Instead, He is telling us not to live in a state of fear or worry, do not be preoccupied or side-tracked by worry because we can call upon God for help. We can look to Him for peace.

We can no more eliminate the emotions of fear and anxiety at times in our lives than we can eliminate other natural emotions. Nevertheless, we can learn to manage our fears and anxieties so they do not control us or interfere with our lives. For the person of faith, the immutability of God, the fact that He is unchanging, should be the focus for the Christian to foster a growing sense of stability to life. The love and divine care of God offered to those who call on Him and so many other promises in Scripture should be the focus.

Additionally, there are trained professionals everywhere who have devoted themselves to helping those who have problematic anxiety to make changes in all aspects of one's thoughts and physical health.

I cannot emphasize too much that God does not condemn us for having the natural human emotions given by Him, but rather encourages us to look to Him for help in managing those emotions so that we do not live a life driven by our emotions. Balance is a key principle in all healthy living—including our spiritual life. This includes not over-spiritualizing our experience to the point we lose the benefit of sound theological truth and common sense.

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