

Foreword



For a long time, I saw anxiety as an enemy I had to overcome and a frustrating roadblock to my faith. I masked it beneath layers of perfectionism, overworking, and people-pleasing. I would read verses about it and feel judgment and shame. Passages like “Be anxious for nothing” (Philippians 4:6), “Do not worry about your life” (Matthew 6:25), and the hundreds of times we’re reminded, “Don’t be afraid” (Deuteronomy 31:6), “Don’t be afraid” (John 14:27), “Don’t be afraid” (Isaiah 41:10) all felt like words of condemnation to my struggling soul. I couldn’t reconcile what God said about anxiety in Scripture with the very real and persistent symptoms of anxiety that continued to plague my days, no matter how hard I tried or how much I prayed. I just wanted anxiety to go away so that I could experience the joy and peace I so longed for.

But sometimes, the hard thing we don’t want is the very thing God can use to turn our hearts toward him. Sometimes, the things we think are keeping us from experiencing peace and rest are the very things God can use to draw us closer to the source of peace himself.

It turns out, anxiety isn’t our enemy. And those verses that once felt like condemnation from a harsh judge are actually words of comfort from a loving Father.

God is not mad at us for being anxious, and he isn’t waiting to strike us down because we’re afraid. He knows we will experience anxiety and worry and fear—these are common human emotions. He simply comes to us with unwavering compassion and lovingly reminds us, “You don’t *have* to be afraid. Just come to me. I’m with you, and I’ll take care of you.

You are safe and held and loved.”

It turns out, the limitations we feel are holding us back are actually invitations to draw closer to Christ.

The anxiety we think is an obstacle to our faith is actually an opportunity to experience even deeper peace than we ever imagined possible.

Becky knows this in a profoundly personal way. She has walked this journey. She knows the struggle. And she is a kind and trusted guide helping our anxious souls experience the peace and calm that we so desperately crave.

Whatever your story, however great your anxiety or deep your pain, the truth is:

There are arms that can hold your heart when everything is falling apart.

There is a voice that can calm your fears when anxiety is pressing in.

There are wings that can shelter your soul when the storms of suffering rain down.

And there is a place where shame fades away and hope holds fast, where peace covers the darkness, where calm can fill your soul, and where you can find real rest.

Through the pages of this book, Becky will guide you to that place. She will gently lead you into the open arms of Jesus—right into the center of his presence where there is safety and refuge and help in times of anxiety, worry, and despair.

You don't *have* to be afraid. You don't *have* to worry.

Jesus is here.

You are safe and held and loved.

—JENNIFER TUCKER

Author of *Breath as Prayer* and *Present in Prayer*

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Introduction

Hope for Your Anxious Soul



For years I didn't know what was happening to me. I didn't understand why I would go to bed with a racing mind or wake up feeling like there was a brick on my chest. I didn't know why I often carried a deep sadness that didn't match my circumstances. Why was my body tense and my thoughts scattered and my heart so knotted up with grief and worry? And why did those knots seem to stack together in a wall of pain and irritation that kept me feeling distant from God and the people I love?

For years I didn't know that I struggled with anxiety.

I thought that if I just prayed more, tried harder, or managed my time better, then *I* would be better. I believed my anxiety was my own scarlet A, the mark of a weak or faithless Christian. Surely if I just trusted God more, then I wouldn't feel this way. Struggling with anxiety felt like an indictment on my character and something that I needed to fix—*stat!*

Eventually I discovered that not only was my anxiety a legitimate diagnosis—worthy of intervention and support just like any physical malady—but in many ways it was also a gift.

How could I possibly consider anxiety a *gift*? Because it was what led me to experience more of God's powerful presence, tangible grace, and practical strength.

I've spent years finding a trustworthy path toward healthy coping, peace, and healing. This path has looked like getting radically honest about my struggles, going to therapy, and taking medication when needed. I thank God for tools and resources to address the physical and psychological aspects of anxiety.

But anxiety is something that not only impacts the body and mind—it also affects the soul. Whether you relate to the ways anxiety manifests for me or not, you probably deal with anxious feelings on some level. From everyday stress and worry to a clinical diagnosis, the continuum of anxiety impacts everyone.

When your soul is anxious, it's hard to trust God and remember His promises. When your soul is anxious, it's easy to feel discouraged, defeated, and utterly alone. An anxious soul is like a tornado of worry and what-ifs swirling at breakneck speed on a highway of destruction—able to shatter your confidence, splinter your relationships, and flatten your faith. But what if an anxious soul wasn't a terror to hide from but an opportunity to draw closer to God?

That angsty, knotted-up, restless feeling is there not to shame you but to usher you toward the One you really need. In my most anxious moments, the only place I've found true rest, relief, and restoration for my soul is in the presence of Jesus.

Jesus says, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light" (Matthew 11:28–30).

Come. That's the invitation. And whom does Jesus invite to come? *All who are weary and burdened.* That's me. And that's you. Do you see the freedom here? Jesus *expects* us to be weary and burdened! He knows that as imperfect people living in a broken world, we are going to be weighed down by worry and anxiety. He doesn't condemn us for it; he offers to carry the burden with us.

As we accept Jesus's invitation to come to him, we also get to *learn* from him. We can learn how to stop relying on our own faltering strength and start depending on his steadfast care. We can stop trying to control our lives and master our anxiety and instead surrender it all to God and *find rest* for our anxious souls.

Yes, this gift is real and you can start experiencing it one day at a time.

WHAT YOU'LL FIND IN THIS BOOK

A Verse a Day for the Anxious Soul is a gentle guide that will help you encounter the life-changing presence of Jesus. Like the title promises, every day you'll discover a **verse** to soothe and encourage your anxious soul. Don't just glance at these verses—linger on them. Try reading the daily verse aloud, write it in your journal, underline it in your physical Bible, or look it up in a different translation. The point is to *engage* with God's Word! (It's okay if you're not accustomed to reading the Bible. I'll be walking with you, and God's got something for you!) Scripture is our soul's oxygen—essential, life giving, and sustaining.

Each verse is followed by a short **devotion**. This is where I get to come alongside you as a fellow anxiety wrestler and share soul-steadying truth that always leads back to Jesus. We'll dig into a scripture together, and I'll share what it means in a way that's clear, relatable, and exactly what I needed when my anxiety was spiraling out of control.

Next, you'll find a simple exercise to **inhale truth** and **exhale trust**. This practice combines the physiological benefits of breath regulation with the spiritual benefits of Scripture meditation. When you inhale truth and exhale trust, God's Word will sink deeper into your mind and soul, providing long-lasting peace and strength. I recommend inhaling slowly for four counts, holding for four counts, exhaling for four counts, and pausing for four counts. (This is often referred to as box breathing or square breathing.) Do this three times. Or follow the inhale-exhale prompts in whatever way feels best to you.

Lastly, you'll reflect and talk to God through a written **prayer**. Sometimes when we're knotted up with anxiety or overwhelmed by difficult circumstances, it can be hard to know what to pray. I've been there. So borrow these words and make them your own. Each prayer will set you on a path of peace and growth as you come to Jesus, trust him to help carry your load, and receive his gift of rest for your soul.

Throughout the book, you'll also find fourteen **Peace Practices**—simple, down-to-earth ways to shift from stress and anxiety to peace and calm. Since anxiety affects our bodies, minds, and souls, these practical

tools will help you create new habits and healthy rhythms to ease anxiety and bring balance to every part of your life.

The devotions are numbered for your convenience, but there's no pressure to rush through one hundred days in a row. These pages are here to help you trust in Jesus, to rest and connect with him. So move at the pace that feels right for you.

We can let anxiety make us feel disqualified from closeness with God, or we can let it be the catalyst for greater intimacy with him. In taking just a few intentional minutes a day, your soul can transform from a storm of fear, worry, and overwhelm into a sanctuary of God's powerful peace.

You don't have to stay knotted up in anxiety. There is hope, and it's available to you right now.

I've reached the point in my life where I refuse to face life in my own strength. In fact, I can't. I need Jesus—desperately. Let's seek him together, with open hearts and a renewed sense of purpose. The peace we're longing for is within reach.



Before You Begin



Friend, I am not a doctor, therapist, or psychologist. This book is not intended to diagnose or treat clinical anxiety. As we'll explore in the pages ahead, some kinds of anxiety are common to all people—situational anxiety, daily overwhelm, occasional worry. But anxiety can also persist outside the threshold of typical stress.

If your anxiety is severe, please seek professional help. I've logged many hours talking to a physician and a counselor about my anxiety disorder. There is no shame in needing immediate intervention or ongoing support.

If you are in intense emotional distress, feel mentally unsafe, or are considering harming yourself, please call or text 988. The Suicide & Crisis Lifeline is available 24-7. Conversations are free and confidential.

Please don't suffer alone. Help is available.

You are worthy of support and healing.

Your life matters. You are so loved.

A
Verse
a Day
for the
Anxious
Soul



1

Stop Carrying It All Alone



Praise the Lord; praise God our savior!
For each day he carries us in his arms.

—PSALM 68:19

God gave me a mental picture that I never want to forget. In it I was carrying a heavy, heavy load. It was piled up so high that I could barely balance it. I struggled to take even a small step forward. I was utterly weighed down and discouraged.

Then I realized that Jesus was standing right next to me. He opened his arms as an invitation to take what I was carrying. One by one, I handed him my burdens. I gave him the heaviness of my anxiety, a difficult relationship, a source of deep pain, an impossible decision.

Somehow, what I struggled to carry with two arms Jesus now held easily with one. Then he put his other arm around my shoulder. In that moment I knew that even if my circumstances never changed, I didn't have to stay crushed by their weight.

With Jesus by my side, I was no longer stuck.

Though I cannot literally see Jesus next to me, this mental picture reminds me that I always have access to his Spirit's very real presence. God dwells in us, which means he's even closer than an arm around our shoulders.

If you're struggling to carry it all—whatever your “all” may be—that's okay. You actually were never meant to do the carrying. Today you can give your heavy load to Jesus. You can accept the indwelling strength of

God's Spirit. He is the only one capable of holding your burdens and helping you take the next step.

Inhale Truth

Jesus comes to my rescue.

Exhale Trust

He carries me in his arms.

Jesus, thank you for meeting me in all my weariness and with all my burdens. I know you didn't intend for me to carry everything on my own. Help me remember that I can come to you no matter what and that you will take my load. Especially when my anxiety flares, help me remember that my joy, peace, and strength reside not in my own effort but in your faithful presence. Amen.

2

God's Help for the Engine in My Chest



God is our refuge and strength,
always ready to help in times of trouble.

—PSALM 46:1

I put my hand on my husband's heart. "It's like there is an engine in my chest. And it's revving, revving, revving for no reason. That's what this anxiety feels like." His look of confusion didn't really change.

"So even if my mind is fine, even if I'm not worried or stressed about anything in particular, the sensations in my body tell my mind that I'm *not* okay. The battle to keep calm and focused on what is true while the engine in my chest relentlessly spins . . . Well, it's exhausting."

I leaned my head on Chris's shoulder and tried to slow my breathing.

My husband and I don't speak the same emotional language. Mine has a lot of words; his, not so much. The language of mental health is also something I know well as someone living with clinical anxiety, but that's not Chris's world. Even though he loves me and wants to support me, it's hard for him to understand me.

I've tried countless ways of putting my anxiety into words. The anxiety doesn't always look or feel the same as worry or stress. It's not just trying to control a situation or fixating on a problem; it's a physiological experience. Like coffee jitters in my heart. Like the mental swirl of a dozen waking dreams that I can't escape. An outer calm masking an inner chaos.

That image of a car engine in my chest was God's grace—evidence of

God's always-ready help in the middle of real-life struggle. While my husband still couldn't fully relate to my experience, this analogy provided a bridge of greater understanding.

If you struggle with anxiety, it's easy to question your feelings and try to keep them hidden. *Am I making all this up? Should I keep it to myself? Should I just try to ignore it and move on?*

The internal battle is real. But here's what I've learned: It's worth it to push through the pain, fear, and awkwardness to tell someone how you really feel. Why? There is power in bringing our struggles out of the darkness of isolation and into the light of shared experience.

When I refuse to hide, I open myself to the light. Shame can't live in the light. Fear doesn't grow in the light. So, I stand in my kitchen, resting my head on my husband's chest as morning light streams through smudged windows, and I know that God sees me. No inner darkness can hide me. His Word will guide me. He will guide you too.

Inhale Truth

God is my refuge and strength

Exhale Trust

My ready help in trouble.

God, thank you for meeting me in the middle of my struggle. You are not far off. You are right here. May my anxiety cause me to run to you, my true safety and strength. Give me creative words and fresh courage to share my pain with others. I need your help. Every hour I need You. Amen.

3

Go to Bed and Take the B



It is useless for you to work so hard
from early morning until late at night,
anxiously working for food to eat;
for God gives rest to his loved ones.

—PSALM 127:2

I've been an achiever for as long as I can remember. When I was three, I was thrilled to master riding a bicycle before my older sister. When I was seven, I challenged my best friend Jack to a race to see who could climb to the tippy-top of a towering tree. In school, I took every advanced class, played three sports, joined multiple clubs, and was always in student government. Doing more and trying harder were how I felt safe, worthy, accepted.

One night in high school, as it was edging toward midnight, I was working to finish an essay. I sat in our upstairs landing in front of a clunky white Macintosh computer, feverishly typing. “Rebecca Dee!” my mom called up from the bottom of the stairs. “Are you still doing homework?” “Yeah, almost done,” I lied. “It’s late! Just go to bed and take the B!” she hollered.

Go to bed and settle for a B? Stop striving and accept less than the best? It was the most preposterous suggestion my adolescent ears had ever heard. Clearly perfectionism and a desire to perform had a hold on me!

I’m not sure when or how the belief took root—maybe out of my desire for control as a child of divorce or maybe as the youngest of three sisters, desperate to be noticed; whatever the reason, I believed *I am what I achieve*. It took me decades to understand the truth that I am God’s

daughter—*that* is the most important thing about me. Regardless of what I do or how I perform, I am loved by God. Period. The same is true for *you*.

Part of my journey has been learning to reframe the way I see rest and productivity. Rest is not a hindrance to achievement, like my high school self adamantly believed; rest is a vital part of being productive. Without physical sleep and mental breaks, our anxiety will skyrocket and we simply cannot operate at our best. Even more, rest is essential to experiencing God, so much so that he made it one of the Ten Commandments.

Rest is an act of dependence. Rest tells God you trust him to work on your behalf. Rest makes space to quiet your noisy, anxious soul long enough to hear his voice. And surely his voice would say, “I love you more than any achievement or grade.”

Inhale Truth

I don't have to strive for God's love.

Exhale Trust

I can just rest in him.

God, I'm so prone to finding my identity in what I accomplish rather than in you. I know working for love, acceptance, or significance only fosters more anxiety. Help me see productivity and rest the way you do, so I can experience the peace that my soul craves. Thank you for loving me no matter what I do. Show me what it looks like to rest in your love today. I want to trust you more. Amen.

4

The Beauty of “And”



Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows.
But take heart, because I have overcome the world.

—JOHN 16:33

We live in a broken world where things break. Cars, relationships, and dreams break. Same with bodies, hearts, and minds. But we don't have to walk through the brokenness alone. This is what I like to call the beauty of “and.” In this world we will have trouble *and* Jesus has overcome the world! We are broken and face all kinds of trials *and* Jesus will make all things beautiful in his time.

Focusing on God's presence and continual work in my life has been especially helpful as I wrestle with mental illness. In fact, I've discovered that reframing the way I see living in the “and” has made all the difference! Here are some “and” statements that are true for me:

I am a woman with anxiety *and* the joy of the Lord is my strength.
I am weighed down *and* I am carried.
I am sorrowful *and* full of peace.
My sadness swells *and* I am secure no matter my emotions.
I am often overwhelmed *and* I am never completely overcome.

The Bible is also full of beautiful “ands”! The disciples were scared of the storm *and* Jesus was with them. Paul had a thorn in his flesh *and* God's grace was sufficient. Jesus died on the cross *and* he rose from the dead. In the middle of the mess is where we meet Jesus. In the tension of “and” is where we experience his grace.

As an anxiety warrior and advocate, here's what I know: You can suffer

from mental illness *and* be a faithful follower of Jesus. You can trust fully in God *and* be at the end of your rope. You can read your Bible every day *and* still need medication.

Spend time today identifying the beautiful “ands” in your life. Choose one of these and make it your breath prayer throughout the day:

I am weak *and* I have access to God’s strength.

I am struggling *and* I am not alone.

I have areas to grow in *and* God will help me bear fruit.

Jesus came for the broken. That’s me. That’s you. He is so able and willing to hold all our jagged pieces and make something beautiful.

Inhale Truth

My trials weigh heavy.

Exhale Trust

And Jesus has overcome.

Jesus, thank you for being mindful of my trials and troubles. You see and understand what I’m going through. You meet me in my sorrows with your strength. Help me keep believing that anxiety is just one half of the beautiful “and” you have for my life. You’re always writing my story, always overcoming my pain with your power. I’m so grateful. Amen.