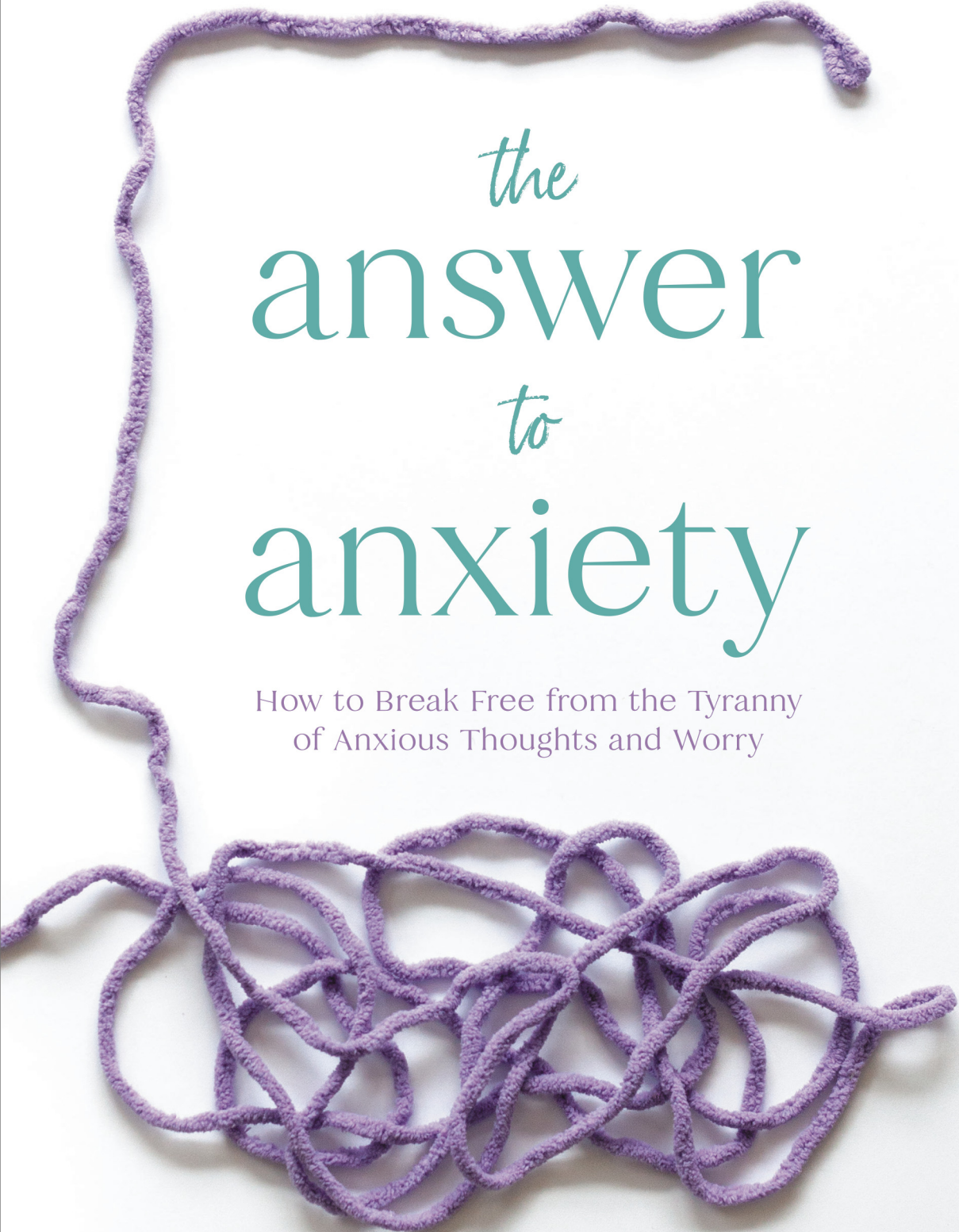


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#1 *New York Times* Bestselling Author of *Battlefield of the Mind*



the
answer
to
anxiety

How to Break Free from the Tyranny
of Anxious Thoughts and Worry

THE ANSWER TO ANXIETY

How to Break Free from the Tyranny of
Anxious Thoughts and Worry

JOYCE MEYER



NEW YORK • NASHVILLE

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INTRODUCTION

Anxiety and worry are common human responses to stressful situations. We all feel anxious, worried, or concerned at times. But if anxiety becomes severe enough, it may require medical attention, which could include some type of professional counseling and/or medication. Situations that typically require such intervention include long-term stress or unbalanced hormones or neurotransmitters. When therapy or medication is warranted, we should not feel ashamed of getting the help we need.

According to the Anxiety and Depression Association of America, “Anxiety disorders are the most common and pervasive mental disorders in the United States.”¹ Take a look at these statistics²:

“Anxiety disorders are the most common and pervasive mental disorders in the United States.”

- Anxiety disorders affect 40 million adults in the United States (18.1 percent of the population) every year. Anxiety disorders are the most common mental illnesses in the United States.
- Only 36.9 percent of those suffering from anxiety receive treatment, even though it is highly treatable.

- Risk factors including genetics, brain chemistry, personality, and life events contribute to the development of anxiety disorders.
- Anxiety disorders and depression are linked. Almost half of people diagnosed with depression are also diagnosed with an anxiety disorder.
- Women are twice as likely to be affected by generalized anxiety disorder as men.
- Stress and anxiety affect everyone at one time or another.
- Stress is a response to a threat in a certain situation. Anxiety is a reaction to that stress.
- Anxiety disorders affect 25.1 percent of teenagers. Teens with untreated anxiety disorders are at higher risk for poor school performance, missing out on important social experiences, and substance abuse.
- Older adults experience anxiety at rates similar to teenagers, although anxiety disorders in this population are frequently associated with traumatic events such as a fall or acute illness.

Anxiety is a clinical term. As you can see, much research has been conducted regarding anxiety, and it is a serious problem. However, there is another type of anxiety that comes with our day-to-day trials and stressful situations.

“Worrying is carrying tomorrow’s load with today’s strength.”

It is called worry.

Corrie Ten Boom said, “Worrying is carrying tomorrow’s load with today’s strength—carrying

two days at once. It is moving into tomorrow ahead of time.”³ I think one reason people end up with serious anxiety or depression disorders is that they don’t address the anxiety we all face daily and let it build until it becomes unhealthy or unmanageable. There are, of course, other more serious underlying causes of anxiety, such as abuse during childhood, severe long-lasting illness, loss of a loved one, working too hard for too long, not getting enough rest or sleep, and other conditions.

In this book, I want to address the daily anxieties and worries that we deal with simply because we live in a sinful world that presents us with frequent problems. Jesus says that we will have trouble while we are in the world, but to take heart, or cheer up, because He has overcome the world (John 16:33). If we can learn to deal with daily anxieties quickly, they will have no opportunity to turn into mental disorders. We can and should learn from God’s Word how to deal with our daily situations.

If you deal with daily anxieties quickly, they have no opportunity to turn into mental disorders.

The quicker we refuse to worry when we are tempted to do so, the less likely we are to have serious problems with anxiety.

My husband, Dave, never worries. Part of the reason for this is his natural temperament and part of it is his trust in God. He truly believes God will take care of him, and he has a genuine revelation of 1 Peter 5:7, which says to cast “the whole of your care [all your anxieties, all your

worries, all your concerns, once and for all] on Him, for He cares for you affectionately and cares about you watchfully” (AMPC). I have a son-in-law and a daughter-in-law who are the same way. They are genuinely at peace, no matter what is happening in their life.

However, I’ve learned that although some people seem calm no matter what the situation may be, they may internalize their frustration, fear, and worry. This can be more harmful than expressing their negative emotions. I’ve heard that people either explode or implode if they don’t learn to deal with their emotions properly. For years, I was the type to explode, but eventually all of my explosions also caused me to implode. In December 2017, after years of unreasonable stress caused by many situations, I fell apart, so to speak, and became extremely ill due to a condition that had taken years to develop and took more than eighteen months to recover from.

The illness turned out to be a blessing in disguise. It was a turning point in my life, and it provoked me to make changes I had needed to make for a long, long time.

Excessive stress left unaddressed will lead to a crisis of some kind.

If excessive stress is left unaddressed, it will build to the point where our bodies, minds, and emotions simply can’t deal with it any longer, and we will reach a crisis point of some kind. Sooner or later we must admit, “I just cannot do it all anymore.”

Trusting God to take care of the things we cannot do anything about and trusting Him to give us the direction

we need to handle what we can do ourselves should be our normal response to problems. When we try to solve our problems through worry and reasoning (trying to figure out in our minds why something has happened or what to do about it), we don't get answers, but we do get frustration and more stress.

People don't want to worry when they have problems, but most people would say that they can't prevent themselves from doing it. This, of course, is not true, because Jesus tells us not to worry (Matthew 6:25). There must be a way for us not to worry, because Jesus never tells us to do something that is impossible.

I believe the Bible gives us an easy and understandable formula regarding how to stay in peace instead of being anxious when we have problems that create stress. It's Philippians 4:6–7 (NKJV):

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

These two verses offer the formula on which this book is based, which you'll discover as you keep reading. It's simple, as many of God's answers to our problems are, but we tend to complicate things that could be simple by doing things our way instead of His way.

Charles Stanley says, “We could all work up a nervous breakdown in thirty seconds if we really wanted to.”⁴ I would say that on most days, we can find something to worry about unless we choose not to, and I have learned that every day I spend worrying is a day I waste and one I will never get back. I am not interested in wasting any more of my time doing things that do not work and tend to make me miserable.

Every day you spend worrying is a day you waste and one you will never get back.

In order not to worry and be anxious, we must learn new ways—God’s ways—to handle our problems and challenges. I am happy to be writing this book because I plan to get help from it as I study to write it. At this very moment, I have two different situations in my life that I don’t want to worry about, and I am asking God to help me. Worry keeps coming to my mind, and I keep refusing it. But worry is a very persistent enemy. In order to live life without worry and anxiety, we must be just as persistent at resisting it as our enemy the devil is at pressuring us with it.

God’s will for us is peace, not worry and anxiety, so I pray you will join me as we learn together how to live a worry- and anxiety-free life.

CHAPTER 1

Be Anxious for Nothing

Worry a little bit every day and in a lifetime you will lose a couple of years. If something is wrong, fix it if you can. But train yourself not to worry. Worry never fixes anything.

Mary Hemingway⁵

God allots each of us a certain amount of time to live on earth, and we either waste it or use it wisely. When that time is gone, we can never get it back, so it seems that we would not want to waste even one minute, but we do. Sometimes we waste our time by doing frivolous or foolish things that bear no fruit. Often, though, we waste our time feeling sorry for ourselves, being angry or depressed, letting fear control us, feeling anxious or worried, or allowing ourselves to express other negative emotions. I hope this book will help you not to waste any more of your valuable time being anxious or worried about anything.

When we spend today being anxious or worried about tomorrow, we waste today and accomplish nothing that will change tomorrow. Jesus teaches us to live one day at a time and not to spend any of them worrying:

When we waste today being anxious, we accomplish nothing that will change tomorrow.

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to

your life? And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, “What shall we eat?” or “What shall we drink?” or “What shall we wear?” For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Matthew 6:25–34

Let’s think about what this Scripture passage teaches. First, Jesus says not to worry about anything—food, drink, or clothing (v. 25). For that matter, don’t worry about anything in your life, because your life is more important to God than all the “things” you want and need.

Second, we should do a little bird watching. This may sound funny, but it is exactly what Jesus suggests we do. Birds are everywhere, so we should not have a hard time watching them. Birds are not nervous, anxious, or worried. They fly around happily waiting for their next meal to appear. The meal may consist of seeds that have fallen

from a plant or tree, bird seed that someone has put out because they have a bird feeder, a worm, or some kind of bug on the ground, which God provides for them. Verse 26 tells us that God provides for the birds and says that we are more valuable than they are, so why should we doubt that He will provide for us?

Then comes the question we should all ask ourselves in verse 27: Does worry do any good, and can it add even a single hour to our life? It cannot add to our life, but it can steal from it.

Jesus then asks why we worry about our clothing (v. 28). Maybe you don't worry about clothes, but there is likely something pertaining to everyday life that you do worry about. Jesus challenges us to look at the flowers and notice how He clothes them so beautifully. They never labor or spin, and they don't worry or become fearful and anxious. But not even King Solomon, in all his glory and splendor, was dressed as fine as a little flower (vv. 28–29). Take some time and look at your flowers. If you don't have any, go to a park or a garden and just look at how beautiful and amazingly different each one is.

Jesus also mentions something we usually don't think about: the grass. He takes care of grass, which is here today and gone tomorrow (v. 30).

Don't be a person of little faith. Have big faith, because God knows what you need. Unbelievers seek and worry about necessities such as food, drink, and clothing. But, as believers, you

Have big faith, because God knows what you need.

and I are to “seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (v. 33).

Jesus continues, saying, “Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own” (v. 34). To that, I say, “Amen!” In the past month, Dave and I had to have our television repaired. We also had a larger gas line put in our home because our generator wasn’t working correctly, and after paying several hundred dollars for it, the generator still doesn’t work as it should. And every time we have a really hard rain and the wind blows in a certain direction, we get water in our house. This has gone on for almost two years, and no one can figure out why it happens. In addition, Dave’s golf cart needed a new battery. I found out I need cataract surgery. What concerns me most is that my eyes are already terribly dry, and cataract surgery makes them drier, at least for a few months. The surgery will require two procedures, one on each eye. In the midst of the two operations, I need to try to do as much teaching for television in the studio as I possibly can, so I don’t get too far behind with our daily program. I also have a speaking engagement and have no idea what my eyes will feel like or how well I will be able to see.

I share this glimpse into my life because I want you to know that challenges happen to everyone. It is part of life, and each situation eventually gets solved. Worrying about it doesn’t change a thing, except that it steals our peace and joy.

Jesus is telling us in Matthew 6:25–34 to take life one day at a time—and not to worry about anything—because each day has all we can handle. Natural storms

Like natural storms, the personal storms that come into our lives are often unexpected.

are not always in the weather forecast, and often the storms that come into our lives are also unexpected. However, people of great faith are ready for anything.

Paul teaches in Philippians 4:13 that we “can do all things through Christ,” who strengthens us (NKJV). The amplification of this verse says that we are “ready for anything and equal to anything through Him” that comes our way (AMPC). This is a great promise to meditate on regularly. It builds our faith and prepares us for whatever a day may bring.

In addition to keeping Philippians 4:13 in mind, we should have the same attitude that the missionary Hudson Taylor had:

I am no longer anxious about anything, as I realise this; for He, I know, is able to carry out *His will*, and His will is mine. It makes no matter where He places me, or how. That is rather for Him to consider than for me; for in the easiest positions He must give me His grace, and in the most difficult His grace is sufficient.⁶

What Are Anxiety and Worry?

I'm sure you know what I mean when I use the words *anxiety* and *worry* because everyone has experience with these feelings. I have explained them briefly, but let's think more thoroughly about what they mean. The simplest way

Anxiety is spending today dreading tomorrow.

I know to define anxiety is to say that it means spending today trying to figure out tomorrow or spending today fearing or dreading tomorrow. It is an uneasy

feeling of worry, uncertainty, dread, fear, or agitation. In the Bible, anxiety is depicted as the common human reaction to stressful situations.

Stressful situations abound in many of our lives. I believe most of us always have something we could worry about unless we intentionally choose not to. The psalmist confessed that when anxiety was great within him, God's comfort calmed him down and brought him joy (Psalm 94:19), and Saul's father was anxious during a time when his donkeys were lost (1 Samuel 9:5), so we can see that people throughout history have had to deal with anxiety and worry.

Anxiety, if not confronted, can lead to more serious problems—depression, for example. Proverbs 12:25 says that anxiety can cause depression: “Anxiety in the heart of man causes depression, but a good word makes it glad” (NKJV). Anxiety is inconsistent with trusting God, which is what we are to do at all times and in every situation. But

anxiety has always been an unusually difficult challenge for us, and it always will be. It is Satan's method of stealing the peace that Jesus died to give us. Every time a situation arises that could be stressful or would cause us to be anxious or worried, we have to renew our commitment to trust God instead of being anxious.

Every time a situation causes us to be anxious, we must renew our trust in God instead of being anxious.

Anxiety is rooted in fear. For example, we become anxious when we are afraid we will lose something or someone important to us, when we are afraid we won't be taken care of, when we are afraid that something bad will happen to us, or when we are afraid we won't get what we want or need. Because we are afraid, we try to take care of situations ourselves. This, of course, causes us to worry and reason as we try to come up with solutions. We cannot enjoy peace of mind if our minds are filled with thoughts of how we can solve our problems.

A man's mind plans his way [as he journeys through life], but the Lord directs his steps and establishes them.

Proverbs 16:9 AMP

I am thankful that even though we make our plans, if they are not right, God does interrupt them and direct our steps in the right direction. His thoughts and ways are higher than our thoughts and ways (Isaiah 55:8–9).

When we worry, we allow our thoughts to rotate around and around the same situation, playing out the potential outcomes in our mind. Most of the terrible outcomes we imagine don't happen, but the fear that they might happen causes us to be tormented.

Approximately five hundred years ago, Michel de Montaigne said: "My life has been filled with terrible misfortune; most of which never happened."⁷ Those events happened only in his mind and imagination, but he suffered as though they actually took place.

Most of what people worry will happen never happens.

Don Joseph Goewey, author of *The End of Stress*, says that about 85 percent of what people worry will happen never happens.⁸

The Bible tells us to meditate on God's Word (Joshua 1:8), and I tell people that if they know how to worry, they know how to meditate. We can meditate on God's promises to us, or we can meditate on our problems; the choice is ours. One produces bad fruit, and one produces good fruit. One steals our joy and may even damage our health, while the other gives us peace and enables us to enjoy our life while God is working on our problems.

Philippians 4:6–7 (NKJV), the scriptures on which this book is based, is one of my favorite Bible passages:

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the

peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

As I mentioned in the introduction to this book, I see in these verses four distinct ways we can respond when we encounter problems; they are actions that will allow us to enjoy life no matter what happens:

1. We are not to be anxious.
2. We are to pray.
3. We are to be thankful.
4. We are to enjoy peace.

I truly believe that if we can understand the power of Philippians 4:6–7, we will find the answer to anxiety. This is my go-to Scripture passage any time I begin to worry. I have memorized these verses, so I rehearse them in my mind, and sometimes I even open my Bible and look at them.

Any time I have a problem, my first instinct is to worry, but after doing that for a few minutes, I remind myself that I have often traveled the road of worry, and it has never once taken me to my desired destination, which is peace. It has never given me a solution to the problems I face. Worrying is like rocking in a rocking chair all day: It keeps you busy but gets you nowhere.

The road of worry has never taken me to my desired destination.

The formula for dealing with our problems begins with “Be anxious for nothing” (Philippians 4:6 NKJV). This is easy to read and easy to say, but sometimes it’s difficult to do. People often need some simple steps to help them not to be anxious about anything, and I have identified five keys to overcoming anxiety, which we will explore in the next several chapters.