

# Fear and Its Remedies

All set for the next terrorist attack? Got your biohazard suit? How 'bout your gas mask, radiation detector and potassium iodide pills? A new store opened in Manhattan recently, only a few blocks from Ground Zero. "Safer America" markets personal safety products for a post-9/11 world.

Work in a high-rise? Have you considered a personal parachute? It comes in two models: the streamlined Executive Chute and the deluxe "HOPE" system (High Office Parachute Escape; opens automatically, good from heights over 100 feet, accommodates persons up to 300 pounds).

Safer America President Harvey Kushner takes a pragmatic approach to homeland security: "These products are no different than safety devices already commonplace in most homes, such as fire extinguishers, smoke detectors, and first-aid kits. We are enabling people to alleviate their fears by doing something smart and productive: preparing to overcome that which they most fear."

Fears abound these days. CIA director George Tenet recently warned Congress that al-Qaida could attack at any time here or abroad. A sampler, from a guy who is privy to more intelligence data than most of us: "Based on what we have learned about the 11 September [attacks], an attempt to conduct another attack on U.S. soil is certain.

"You must make the analytical judgment that the possibility exists that people are planning to attack you inside the United States—multiple simultaneous attacks. We are the enemy, we're the people they want to hurt inside this country," Tenet said.

As Tenet spoke, the nation was still on alert code yellow—"significant risk of terrorist attacks"—because officials had no specific details about time and location of

possible attacks. Frightening times. How should we deal with fear?

We trust military and law enforcement to keep us safe from harm. But we can never completely prepare for every risk in life. And eventually life will end for each of us. What then?

Besides taking reasonable precautions, might it also be worth considering something deeper as an ultimate solution to fear? An Israeli shepherd who became a king knew dangers from wild beasts and wild political enemies who sought his life.

“The Lord is my shepherd,” he wrote. “I have everything I need. Even when I walk through the dark valley of death, I will not be afraid, for you [God] are close beside me. Your rod and your staff protect and comfort me.”

A descendant of this king, Jesus of Nazareth, offered similar advice to His friends: “Don’t be afraid of those who want to kill you. They can only kill your body; they cannot touch your soul. Fear only God,” He taught. God loves people, values them and saves a spot in eternity for those who trust Him.

It’s hard to turn on the news these days without finding cause for fear: terrorism, snipers and financial woes augment personal concerns about relationships, family and job future. Maybe it’s time to look more closely toward One who can calm fears and who holds the future in His hands.

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## **Anxious for Nothing (radio transcript)**

# What Makes You Anxious?

What makes you feel anxious? What do you worry about? Finances? Conflict at work or with your neighbors? Making today's appointment on time? Perhaps your family or your health.

Anxiety seems everywhere these days. September 11th brought fears of flying and of the mail. Homeland security alerts have raised tensions.

A necessary war with an uncertain future can make stomachs churn. An unpredictable economy can affect bank balances, business plans, education, and retirement.

One bright sign: In the wake of the terrorist attacks, pizza sales were up. Have you ever used pizza as comfort food?

"Death is the only joy, and the only release." "Contrary to popular belief, there is no hope." These anonymous statements from a university newspaper and classroom blackboard exhibit what psychologists call "existential anxiety," concern over frustration with a meaningless existence.

When I was a junior at Duke University, I wrote a paper for an abnormal psychology class investigating a biblical therapy for anxiety. I had come to faith as a freshman and found it brought me peace of mind. While studying psychology, I was fascinated to see that complex psychological disorders often stem from simple problems like anxiety, problems for which faith offers practical solutions.

I sent a copy of my paper to the author of our textbook, a prominent UCLA psychologist. A month later, he replied that he liked the paper and asked permission to quote from it in the revision to his text.

I picked my jaw up off the floor and said "By all means!" Actually, the first thing I did was send a copy of his letter

to my parents in Miami so they would know their son had not gone off the deep end with my involvement in a campus Christian group. (They were beginning to wonder.)

This professor's response to the paper indicated that the principles it contains – which certainly were not original with me – had both academic and personal relevance.

Anxiety has many causes, including emotional struggles, relationship deficiencies, aimlessness, poor diet or exercise, and chemical or hormonal imbalance. In this short essay, we will consider

three possible causes: guilt, fear, and lack of friendship. And we will consider a solution to each cause that very well could make a difference in your life.

Have you felt guilty recently? Let us look at guilt, a significant cause of anxiety.

## **Guilt or Not Guilty?**

Guilt can make you feel anxious.

What makes you feel guilty? Losing your temper? Shading the truth? Maybe taking office supplies from your employer? Cheating on your income tax return? Cheating on your spouse?

Some psychologists say that feelings of guilt come from unresolved past conflicts or from following outdated moral codes. Solutions in these views involve recognizing our past problems or relaxing our moral codes.

Of course, past problems can affect us. And many people follow overly rigid behavior codes. But should we also consider that sometimes – maybe often – people feel guilty because they are guilty?

Admitting you are wrong can be hard. Perhaps you've heard of the writer who asked his domineering editor if he had ever

been wrong. "Yes," replied the editor. "I was wrong once. It was when I thought I was wrong but I wasn't."

O. H. Mowrer, a psychologist at the University of Illinois, pointed out a common dilemma for people trying to face their own shortcomings:

*Here, too, we encounter difficulty, because human beings do not change radically until first they acknowledge their sins, but it is hard for one to make such an acknowledgement unless he has "already changed." In other words, the full realization of deep worthlessness is a severe ego "insult," and one must have a new source of strength to endure it.*[\[1\]](#)

A biblical perspective offers a new source of strength. The biblical God loves humans and wants our happiness. We all blow it at times, by harmful actions or unhealthy attitudes, and miss His standards. One follower of Jesus outlined what he saw as God's solution: "God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ."[\[2\]](#)

If I had a traffic fine that I could not pay, you could offer to pay it for me. Similarly, Christ paid the penalty due our sins through His death on the cross. He offers us new life when we personally trust Him to forgive us. One early believer wrote, "God has purchased our freedom with his blood and has forgiven all our sins."[\[3\]](#) When we feel guilty, we can admit our sin to God and He will forgive us.[\[4\]](#)

Take it from a guilty person: being forgiven is wonderful. And the complete forgiveness – freedom from guilt – that Jesus offers is free.

Fear is another cause of anxiety; let us look at that next.

# What's Your Greatest Fear?

What do you fear most? Confrontation? Maybe financial loss or abandonment? Your stomach, neck and shoulders tense up; your heart races; your mouth becomes like cotton and your breath gets short. Anxiety strikes.

Fear of death is perhaps humans' greatest fear. In college, the student living next door to me was struck and killed by lightning. Shock gripped our fraternity house. "What does it mean if life can be snuffed out in an instant?" my friends asked.

If you cannot answer the question "What will happen when you die?" you may become anxious.

Fear of circumstances – from the trivial to the traumatic – can bring anxiety. Once at a bookseller's convention my wife and I had spent an exhausting day on our feet promoting a new book. Late that night, after a reception crowd had thinned to mostly authors and our publisher, we stood in a circle engaged in conversation. I left her side momentarily to attend to a matter.

Upon returning to the circle, I walked up behind my wife and began gently to massage her shoulders. She seemed to enjoy that, so I started to put my arms around her waist to give her a little hug. At that point, I looked up at the other side of the circle and saw . . . my wife. I had my hands on the wrong woman!

In that instant, I knew the true meaning of fear. Fear of circumstances. Even fear of death.

Is there a solution to fear? Jesus of Nazareth said He could replace fear with peace: "I am leaving you with a gift," He told His followers, "peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give isn't like the peace the world gives. So don't be troubled or afraid."[\[5\]](#)

For fear of death, He offers eternal life. He told a worried friend, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me . . . are given eternal life . . . and will never perish."[\[6\]](#)

Faith can help allay circumstantial fear. Believing that I am in God's hands has helped keep me calm.

Or maybe I should say calmer. My life is not fear-free. I have even become anxious about speaking on anxiety! I can be fearful over an important project, a deadline or a strained relationship. Having God as a friend has not eliminated fear, but when fear comes I know whose hand to hold.

Speaking of friendship, lack of it can also make you anxious. We will look at that next.

## **A Little Help from Your Friends**

William Glasser, a psychiatrist, says we all experience two basic needs: the need to love and to be loved and the need to feel a sense of worth to ourselves and to others. To satisfy these needs he recommends developing a close friendship with another person who will accept us but also confront us if we act irresponsibly.[\[7\]](#)

We all need close friends.

1996 was a terrible year for me. My wife of 20 years, whom I loved dearly and continue to respect, divorced me. Some trusted coworkers turned against me. I had a cancer scare. (It turned out to be kidney stones, but it still was no fun.)

Divorce hurts. Imagine the pain of the worst spat you have ever had with a friend or spouse, multiplied by a trillion. I felt like an emotional Roto Rooter was reaming me out. I cried buckets.

In the midst of my pain, several wonderful friends held my

hand. They would invite me to eat or to attend a sporting event. They listened. They called to see how I was doing. They prayed for me. They sat with me in divorce court. I learned through them what true friendship can mean. They helped me to survive this tragedy and to land on my feet. I am eternally grateful.

Good friends are very important. But human friendship, necessary as it is, is still fallible. People can let us down and make mistakes in judgment. Wouldn't the ultimate in therapy consist in becoming involved with our creator? The biblical documents say that God is "faithful and righteous."[\[8\]](#) He never lets us down and He always has the best advice. He loves us, so much that He would send His son to die for us.

Paul, a prolific ancient writer and speaker, wrote of the depths of God's love:

*I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from his love. Death can't, and life can't. . . . Our fears for today, our worries about tomorrow, and even the powers of hell can't keep God's love away. Whether we are high above the sky or in the deepest ocean, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord."*[\[9\]](#)

Wouldn't it be great to have a friend like that?

Faith in God can help treat causes of anxiety like guilt, fear, and friendship-deficiency. But could faith be just a psychological trick?

## **Is Christianity Just a Psychological Trick?**

In this article, I have claimed that God can treat several causes of anxiety such as guilt, fear and lack of friendship.



You might wonder, “So what? The Christian faith could just be a psychological trick.”

Sigmund Freud taught that Christian faith was merely an illusion driven by wish fulfillment, a fairy tale invented by needy humans to satisfy their emotional needs for security.

Is Jesus’ belief system an illusion? Consider three issues.

First, consider the object of the Christian’s faith. As somewhat of a skeptic, I was surprised to learn that the evidence for Jesus’ deity, His resurrection, and the prophecies He fulfilled make a strong case for the validity of His claims.[{10}](#) The fact that Christian faith can be described in psychological terms does not negate its validity. Examine the object of any faith. If the object is valid, we would expect the faith to have practical benefits.

Second, human personality alone cannot explain all faith-related behavior. Our personalities have intellect, emotion, and will. Many psychologists believe the will cannot completely control the emotions.[{11}](#) Nor is it likely that the intellect could completely control our emotions. Yet many followers of Jesus have suffered humiliation, beatings, torture, cruelty, and death but still have loved their enemies and forgiven their persecutors. Something beyond human personality seems at work here.

Third, the Book in which Jesus’ solutions to anxiety are recorded has unusual credentials. Written over a period of 1,500 years, in three languages and by 40 different authors (most of whom never met), the biblical documents are thematically coherent, internally consistent and historically accurate.[{12}](#) Completed more than 1,900 years ago, the Bible continues to provide workable therapy for millions. A book with these credentials bears a closer look.

This article on anxiety started with a college paper that the author of our textbook found intriguing. This professor told

me he lacked personal peace and wanted to know God personally. I showed him a simple four-point outline and he invited Jesus to forgive him and to be his friend. An internationally acclaimed scholar linked up with, if you will, the greatest psychologist.

Anxiety plagues millions of us. God offers genuine peace. Is that worth considering?

## Notes

1. O. H. Mowrer, "Sin, the Lesser of Two Evils," quoted in Henry R. Brandt, *The Struggle for Peace*, (Wheaton IL: Scripture Press Publications, 1965).
2. 2 Corinthians 5:21, NLT.
3. Colossians 1:14, NLT.
4. 1 John 1:9.
5. John 14:27, NLT.
6. John 11:25-26, NLT.
7. William Glasser, MD, *Reality Therapy*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1965).
8. 1 John 1:9.
9. Romans 8:38-39, NLT.
10. See, for instance, Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence That Demands A Verdict*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999).
11. S.I. McMillen, MD, *None of These Diseases*, (Old Tappen NJ: Fleming H. Revell Publishers, 1968), 77.
12. McDowell, *New Evidence*.

# Anxious for Nothing (magazine article)

*Why are we anxious, and what is the cure? Four possible causes and a glimpse at a solution.*

*This article is also available in [Spanish](#).*



***“Death is the only joy, and the only release.”***

***“Contrary to popular belief, there is no hope.”***

What gloomy thoughts. The first came from the classified section of a college newspaper, the second from an anonymous inscription on a classroom blackboard. Both exhibit what psychologists call “existential anxiety”—frustration with a meaningless existence.

I was plagued by similar anxiety as a college freshman until some friends exposed me to the claims of Jesus Christ as found in the Bible. After accepting Him as Savior and Lord, I found that He freed me from slavery to anxiety. As a psychology major, I was fascinated, first to observe that many serious psychological disorders stem from smaller problems, and in turn to watch Jesus deal with these problems in my life.

Let’s consider two definitions and then examine four main causes of anxiety.

“Anxiety” represents a state of emotional turmoil characterized by fearfulness and apprehension.[\[1\]](#) It is not external stress, but an internal reaction to strenuous circumstances.[\[2\]](#) A “Christian” is an individual who has recognized his lack of fellowship with God and placed his complete trust in Jesus Christ as the only means of restoring that relationship.

Four causes of anxiety are guilt, fear, lack of interpersonal involvement and lack of meaning in life.

## Guilt

Failure to achieve standards (internally or externally imposed) often results in guilt feelings. Often psychologists attribute these feelings to problems in the past or to following legalistic moral codes. Many persons do have these problems, but a more plausible explanation for guilt feelings is that a person has them because he is guilty. If this is true, then therapy for a person experiencing guilt feelings would include admitting his guilt. This, however, can be rather difficult.

O. H. Mowrer, a psychologist at the University of Illinois, points out the dilemma:

Here, too, we encounter difficulty, because human beings do not change radically until first they acknowledge their sins, but it is hard for one to make such an acknowledgement unless he has "already changed." In other words, the full realization of deep worthlessness is a severe ego "insult," and one must have a new source of strength to endure it.<sup>{3}</sup>

Jesus provides the strength needed to endure it. We must come to Him, admitting our sin and worthlessness, but the moment we accept Him as Savior, God forgives all our sins past, present and future. The Bible says that "He (Jesus) personally carried the load of our sins in His own body when He died on the cross . . . "<sup>{4}</sup>and ". . . paid the ransom to forgive our sins and set us free....<sup>{5}</sup> Each year we spend thousands of dollars in the hope that psychology and psychiatrists will solve our guilt problems. Yet the complete forgiveness—freedom from guilt—Jesus offers is free of charge.

# Fear

Let's consider two types of fear: of death and of circumstances. Fear of death is perhaps man's greatest fear. When I was a sophomore in college, the student rooming next to me was struck by lightning and killed. His death shocked the men in my house, and they began to consider seriously the implications of death. Anxiety struck.

The person who accepts Christ as his Savior has no problem with death. The moment he receives Christ, his eternal relationship with God begins. The apostle John writes to Christians, ". . . God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life. . .{6} For the Christian, death loses its terror.

Fear of circumstances can also produce anxiety. Daily anxieties common to all of us include fear of inadequate finances, of social inadequacy, and fear for our personal safety and health.

All of these fears tend to occupy our minds and to keep us from enjoying the privilege of being alive. Enough worry and we soon find ourselves merely existing. But can we really be secure?

Financial security is tenuous, injury and danger are as near as the car whizzing by on the highway, and we can never be certain that everyone likes the way we act.

One summer I drove from Washington, D. C., to California with four girls. After that experience, I know the meaning of fear. Facing this responsibility, I became somewhat apprehensive. What would I do if a car broke down or one of the girls got sick? What if we had an accident? Also, the girls expected me to make all the decisions for the group.

At times, I became fearful, until I remembered what Jesus told His disciples: "Men, don't worry about what you are going to

eat or drink or wear. Your Father in heaven loves you and knows what you need. Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.”{7} And it works.

## Lack Of Involvement

William Glasser, a medical doctor, writes in his book, *Reality Therapy*, that every man experiences two basic needs—the need to feel a sense of worth to himself and to others, and the need to love and to be loved. He says that the best way to satisfy these needs is to develop a close friendship with another person who will accept him as he is, but who will also honestly tell him when he acts irresponsibly.

Interpersonal relationships are important, but people are only human and do let us down and err in judgment. Wouldn't the ultimate therapy be to become involved with our creator? He is faithful and righteous,{8} never lets us down, and always has the best advice. Because He loves us, the Christian experiences freedom to love others.{9} We are worth much to Him: “God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.”{10} A person forgiven values himself, because he is “a new creature.”{11} He is secure in Christ. The apostle Paul writes: “I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord,{12}

## Lack Of Meaning

Another doctor conducted studies of 31,000 Allied soldiers who were imprisoned in Japan and Korea during the 1940's. He found that, although sufficient food was offered to them, more than 8,000 died.{13} He diagnosed the cause of many deaths as “despair.”

Contrast this situation to that of thousands of Christians who have spent years in prison for their faith in Christ, only to be released to continue sharing God's love, especially to those who persecuted them.

The Savior's love sustains them and motivates them as "ambassadors for Christ."[\[14\]](#) What greater purpose could there be than serving as an ambassador for the King of kings?

## A Common Question

Frequently it is suggested that Christianity could be merely a psychological "trick" or gimmick. After all, the reasoning goes, if someone thinks that the Bible is God's Word, couldn't he convince himself that what it says sounds true, and that through following the Bible he has found a groovy lifestyle?

After doing some research, I must conclude that Christianity could not be an illusion. There are three reasons for this.

The first concerns the object of the Christian's faith—Jesus Christ. The evidence for His deity, His resurrection, the prophecies He fulfilled and the lives He has changed present an overwhelming case for the validity of His claims. Because the object of my faith is valid, I believe faith in that object to be valid as well.

The second reason has to do with the nature of human personality, which is composed of intellect, emotion and will. Psychologists feel that our will does not have complete control over our emotions.[\[15\]](#) Nor does it seem likely that our intellect can completely control them. Yet some like those who have been imprisoned find it possible to love those who tortured them. Such behavior seems impossible, apart from supernatural intervention.

The third reason concerns the book that presents Christ's answers to our problems—psychological and otherwise. The Bible, although written over a period of 1,500 years, in three

languages and by 40 different authors (most of whom never met), has proved itself to be thematically coherent, internally consistent and historically accurate. Completed more than 1,800 years ago, it contains the cure for the psychological problems experienced by countless thousands of people today. The Bible is a supernatural book!

As a college student, I was curious to see what a professional psychologist would think of these views. Having written a term paper for my abnormal psychology course investigating how Jesus treats anxiety (this article contains some thoughts from that research), I sent a copy of my paper to the author of our textbook.

In his reply, he expressed an interest in the content. Several months later, I visited him personally, and he told me that he would like to have a personal relationship with Christ. After I shared with him the claims of Christ as contained in the "Four Spiritual Laws," he prayed inviting Jesus Christ to come into his life. The latest edition of his text includes a short statement about the fact that many people today are finding psychological help through Christ.

Men everywhere are searching for freedom from fear and guilt. They need to know that God loves them. If you have never asked Christ to be your personal Lord and Savior, I encourage you to do so today. If you have, tell others how they can know Him.

He frees us to "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 comprehension, shall guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus"[{16}](#)

## Notes

1. Coleman, James C. *Abnormal Psychology and Modern Life*, 3rd edition, p.657.
2. McMillen S. I. *None of These Diseases*, p. 106.



3. Mowrer O. H. "Sin, the Lesser of Two Evils," quoted in Henry Brandt's *The Struggle for Peace*.
4. I Peter 2:24, Living Bible.
5. Colossians 1:14, Beck.
6. I John 5:11,12.
7. Matthew 6:31-33, paraphrased.
8. Psalms 36:5,6.
9. I John 4:19.
10. Romans 5:8.
11. II Corinthians 5:17.
12. Romans 8:38,39.
13. "A Scientific Report on What Hope Does for Man," (New York State Heart Assembly, 105 East 22 St, N.Y.), quoted in McMillen's *None of These Diseases*, p 110.
14. II Corinthians 5-20.
15. McMillen, p. 77.
16. Philippians 4:6,7.

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