

# Overcoming Anxiety: Finding Real Peace When Life Seems Crazy

Rusty Wright

*What makes you feel anxious? Being late or unprepared for work or appointments? Maybe unresolved interpersonal conflict. Airline travel? Public speaking? Fears of losing love? Serious illness or a friend's death?*



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

What makes you feel anxious? Being late or unprepared for work or appointments? Maybe unresolved interpersonal conflict. Airline travel? Public speaking? Fears of losing love? Serious illness or a friend's death?

Pressures from the trivial to the traumatic can prompt feelings of fearfulness or apprehension.

Once at a booksellers convention my wife and I spent an exhausting day on our feet promoting a new book. Late that night, after a reception crowd had thinned down to mostly authors and our publisher, we stood in a circle engaged in conversation. I had to leave 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 this, so I started to put my arms around her waist to give her a little hug. Just then, I looked up at the opposite 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! Confusion clouded my mind. Heat enveloped my back, shoulders, neck and head. My face reddened; my stomach knotted.

You've probably had embarrassing moments that generate anxiety. What about more serious causes?

## **Your Greatest Fear?**

Fear of death is perhaps humans' greatest fear. In college, the student living next door to me was struck and killed instantly by lightning on a golf course one springtime afternoon. Shock gripped our fraternity house. "What does it mean if life can be snuffed out in an instant?" my friends asked. "Is there a life after death and, if so, how can we experience it?" Confusion and anxiety reigned.

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

How can you find real peace in a chaotic world? Consider a possible solution. It involves the spiritual realm.

As a university student, 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. Complex psychological disorders often stem from more basic 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 his revised textbook.

Somewhat amazed, I readily agreed. I also sent a copy of his letter to my parents in Miami, who were beginning to wonder about their son's campus spiritual involvement.

This professor felt that the principles in the paper—which certainly were not original with me—had both academic and personal relevance. Several months

later, we met at his lovely home in Malibu overlooking the Pacific Ocean. As we sat in his back yard, this professor told me he lacked personal peace and wanted to know God personally. I showed him a simple four-point outline based on one of Jesus' statements: "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life." [\[1\]](#)

We discussed God's unconditional love for us, our dilemma of being unplugged from Him and the flaws (selfishness and "sins") that result. I noted that Jesus, through His death in our place and return to life, came to plug us back into God by paying the penalty we owed for our sins.

## **Finding Real Peace**

This professor decided to place his faith in God and asked Jesus to forgive him and enter his life. We kept in touch. Later, over the phone, he told me that as he looked out over the ocean and saw the setting sun, "I really believe I'm a part of all this. Before I didn't, but now I do." He was seeing how he fit into God's universe. An internationally acclaimed scholar linked up with, if you will, the greatest Psychologist.

One of Jesus' earlier followers wrote to some friends about a divine aid for anxiety: "Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. If you do this, you will experience God's peace, which is far more wonderful than the human mind can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus." [\[2\]](#)

Faith in God does not make life perfect and is no automatic solution to anxiety. Illness, chemical imbalance, emotional wounds and more can hamper coping. But a good starting place is to become linked with the One who loves us and knows best what makes us fulfilled.

Might it be time for you to consider Him?

## Notes

1. John 3:16 *NLT* (*New Living Translation*).
2. Philippians 4:6-7 (*NLT*).

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# The Christmas Story: Does It Still Matter?

Rusty Wright

*Christmas often means time with family, hectic shopping, parties, cards and gifts. But what about the first Christmas? Why is the original story—the baby in a manger, shepherds, wise men, angels—important, if at all? The answer may surprise you.*

What does Christmas mean to you? Times with family and friends? Perhaps carols, cards, television specials. Maybe hectic shopping, parties, and eating too much.

All these and more are part of North American Christmas. But what about the first Christmas? Why is the original story—the baby in a manger, shepherds, wise men, angels—important, if at all?

May I invite you to consider eight reasons why the original Christmas story matters, even to you? You may not agree with all of them, but perhaps they will stimulate your thinking and maybe even kindle some feelings that resonate with

that famous story.

First, the Christmas story is important because it is. . .

## **A Story that Has *Endured***

For two millennia, people have told of the child in a Bethlehem manger; of angels who announced his birth to shepherds; of learned men who traveled a great distance to view him. [{1}](#)

That a story persists for many years does not prove its truthfulness. Santa Claus, the Easter Bunny and the tooth fairy survive in the popular imagination. But a twenty-century tenure at least merits our consideration. What deep human longings does the Christmas story portray? Why has it connected so profoundly with millions of people? Is the story factual? Curiosity prompts further investigation.

Second, the Christmas story is also . . .

## **A Story of *Hope and Survival***

Jesus' society knew great pain and oppression. Rome ruled. Corrupt tax collectors burdened the people. Some religious leaders even sanctioned physical beating of Jewish citizens participating in compulsory religious duties. [{2}](#)

Joseph and his pregnant wife Mary traveled a long distance to Bethlehem to register for a census but could not obtain proper lodging. Mary bore her baby and laid him in a manger, a feeding trough for animals. Eventually, King Herod sought to kill the baby. Warned of impending risk, Joseph and Mary fled to Egypt, then returned home after Herod's death.

Imagine how Mary felt. Traveling while pregnant would be challenging. Fleeing to another nation lest some king slay your son would not be pleasant. Yet she,

Joseph, and Jesus survived the ordeal.

In the midst of social and cultural challenges, the Christmas story offers hope and encouragement toward survival, hope of new life linked to something—someone—greater than oneself. One of Jesus' followers said Jesus' "name . . . [would] be the hope of all the world." [\[3\]](#)

So, the Christmas story is important because it has endured and because it speaks of hope and survival.

Reason number three: the Christmas story is . . .

## ***A Story of Peace and Goodwill***

Christmas carolers sing of "peace on earth." Greeting cards extol peace, families desire it, and the news reminds us of its fleeting nature.

I encountered ten-year-old Matt from Nebraska in a southern California restaurant men's room one afternoon. Alone and forlorn looking, he stood outside the lone stall.

"Could I ask a favor?" inquired the sandy haired youth. "The door to this stall has no lock. Would you watch and be sure that no one comes in on me?" "Sure," I replied, happy to guard his privacy. Matt noted, "In a lot of nice restaurants the stall doors don't have locks." "I know," I agreed. "You'd think they would."

After a pause, his high-pitched voice said, "You know what I wish? I wish there could be peace in all the earth and no more arguments or fighting so no one would have to die except by heart attacks." "That would be great," I agreed. "How do you think that could happen?" Matt didn't know.

"It seems that the Prince of Peace could help," I suggested. "Do you know who that is?" He didn't. "Well, at Christmas, we talk a lot about Jesus as the Prince of

Peace,” I explained.

“Oh, I see,” conceded Matt. “I don’t know about those things because I don’t go to church. Do you know what it’s like to be the only boy in your town who doesn’t go to church? I do.”

“Well, I’m a church member,” I replied, “but really the most important thing is knowing Jesus Christ as your personal friend. When I was eighteen, some friends explained to me that He died and rose again for me and that I could begin a relationship with Him. It made a big difference and gave me a real peace inside. He can also bring peace between people.”

By now, Matt was out washing his hands as his father stuck his head in the door to hurry him along. I gave him a small booklet that explained more. “Thanks,” smiled Matt as he walked out to join his family for lunch.

Psychologist Daniel Goleman in his bestselling book *Emotional Intelligence* tells of boarding a New York City bus to find a driver whose friendly greeting and positive disposition spread contagious warmth among the initially cold and indifferent passengers. Goleman envisioned a “virus of good feeling” spreading through the city from this “urban peacemaker” whose good will had softened hearts.[\[4\]](#)

The Christmas angel announced to some shepherds, “Don’t be afraid! . . . I bring you good news of great joy for everyone! The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born tonight in Bethlehem, the city of David!”[\[5\]](#) A crowd of angels then appeared praising God and proclaiming peace among people of good will.[\[6\]](#)

The Christmas story brings a message of peace that can soothe anxious hearts and calm interpersonal strife.

Reason number four: the Christmas story is . . .

## **A Story of *Family***

Christmas is a time for family gatherings. This interaction can bring great joy or great stress. Estrangement or ill will from past conflicts can explode.

Joseph and Mary had their share of family challenges. Consider their circumstances. The historical accounts indicate that Joseph's fiancée became pregnant though she was a virgin. Mary believed an angel told her she was pregnant by God. Now, how would you feel if your fiancé/fiancée exhibited apparent evidence of sexual activity with someone else during your engagement? Suppose your intended said that God had sanctioned the whole thing. Would your trust and self-esteem take a nosedive? Would you cancel the wedding?

Joseph, described as "a just man, decided to break the engagement quietly, so as not to disgrace . . . [Mary] publicly." {7} But an angel appeared to him in a dream, explaining that the child was conceived in her by God, and told him to "name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." {8} Joseph followed instructions and cared for his family. His continuing commitment to Mary and Jesus played a significant part in the boy's birth and early childhood. With God's help, the family overcame major obstacles. And so can your family.

Fifth, the story is Christmas is also . . .

## **A story of *Humility***

When kings, presidents, and other rulers appear in public, great pomp often ensues. From a biblical perspective, God came first not as a ruling king but as a servant, a baby born in humble circumstances. His becoming human helps humans identify with Him.

Imagine that you and your child are walking in a field and encounter an ant pile with hundreds of ants scurrying about. In the distance, you see a construction bulldozer approaching. Suppose your child asks how to warn the ants of



impending danger. You discuss various possibilities: shouting, holding up signs, etc. But the best solution would be if somehow your child could become an ant and warn them personally. Some ants might not believe the danger. But some might believe and take steps to ensure their safety.

Paul, an early follower of Jesus, wrote of the humility Jesus displayed by becoming human:

*Though he was God, he did not demand and cling to his rights as God. He made himself nothing; he took the humble position of a slave and appeared in human form. And in human form he obediently humbled himself even further by dying a criminal's death on a cross. Because of this, God raised him up to the heights of heaven.*[{9}](#)

The Christmas story speaks of family and humility. But is it true?[{10}](#)

Reason number six why the Christmas story matters: it is . . .

## **A Story that Was *Foretold***

Jesus' followers noted numerous clues to his identity, prophecies written many years before His birth.[{11}](#)

The Hebrew writer Micah told around 700 BC of deliverance through a coming Messiah or "Anointed One" from Bethlehem.[{12}](#) We know that ". . . Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea. . ."[{13}](#)

Isaiah, writing around 700 BC, foretold that the Messiah would be born of a virgin. He wrote, "The Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel."[{14}](#) The name "Immanuel" means "God is with us." Biblical accounts claim Jesus' mother was a virgin when she bore Him.[{15}](#)

Additional prophecies concern the Messiah's lineage, betrayal, suffering, execution, and resurrection. Peter Stoner, a California mathematician, once calculated the probability of just eight of the 300 prophecies Jesus fulfilled coming true in one person due to chance alone. Using estimates that both he and classes of college students considered reasonable and conservative, Stoner concluded there was one chance in  $10^{17}$  that those eight were fulfilled by fluke.

He says  $10^{17}$  silver dollars would cover the state of Texas two feet deep. Mark one coin with red fingernail polish. Stir the whole batch thoroughly. What chance would a blindfolded person have of picking the marked coin on the first try? One in  $10^{17}$ , the same chance that just eight of the 300 prophecies "just happened" to come true in this man, Jesus. [{16}](#)

In a similar vein, consider reason number seven why the original Christmas story matters. It is . . .

## **A Story that Has *Substantial Support***

Can we trust the biblical accounts of the Christmas story? Three important points:

- *Eyewitness Testimony*. The Gospels—presentations of Jesus' life—claim to be, or bear evidence of containing, eyewitness accounts. In a courtroom, eyewitness testimony is among the most reliable evidence.
- *Early Date*. Dr. William F. Albright, one of the world's leading archaeologists, dated every book of the New Testament (NT) before about AD 80. [{17}](#) There is no known record of NT factual authenticity ever being successfully challenged by a contemporary.
- *Manuscript Evidence*. Over 24,000 early manuscript copies of portions of the NT exist today. Concerning manuscript attestation, Sir Frederic Kenyon, director and principle librarian of the British Museum, concluded, "Both the authenticity and

the general integrity of the books of the New Testament may be regarded as finally established.” [{18}](#)

The Christmas story is notable for its enduring messages of hope, peace, goodwill, family and humility. It was foretold by prophets and has substantial manuscript support. But there is another reason for considering the story of Jesus’ birth, perhaps the most important.

Reason number eight: the Christmas story is . . .

## ***A Story of Love***

Jesus’ followers taught that His conception and birth were part of a divine plan to bring us genuine peace, inner freedom, and self-respect. They believed the biblical God wants us to enjoy friendship with Him, and meaning and purpose. Alas, our own self-centeredness separates us from Him. Left to our own, we would spend both time and eternity in this spiritually unplugged state.

Jesus came to help plug us into God. Mary’s baby was born to die, paying the penalty for our self-centeredness, which the biblical documents call “sin.” If I had a traffic fine I could not pay, you could offer to pay it for me. When the adult Jesus died on the cross, He carried the penalty due all our sins then rose from the dead to give new life.

Jesus explained, “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.” [{19}](#) God can become your friend if you believe in Him, that is, if you trust Him to forgive you. He will never let you down.

Perhaps you are becoming aware of the importance of the Christmas story in your own life. Might you like to receive Jesus’ free gift of forgiveness and place your faith in Him? You can celebrate this Christmas knowing that you are a member of

His family. Perhaps you'd like to talk to Him right now. You might want to tell Him something like this:

*Jesus Christ, thanks for loving me, for dying for my sins and rising again. Please apply your death as the means of my forgiveness. I accept your pardon. Come and live in me and help me to become your close friend.*

If you made that decision to place your trust in Jesus, He has entered your life, forgiven you and given you eternal life. I encourage you to tell another of His followers about your decision and ask them to help you grow in faith. Call this radio station or visit the Web site [probe.org](http://probe.org) to learn more. Read the Bible to discover more about God. Begin with the Gospel of John, the fourth book in the New Testament, which is one of the easier ones to understand. Tell God what is on your heart, and tell others about the discovery you've made so they can know Him too.

Christmas is meant to celebrate peace and joy. Amidst the busyness of shopping, parties, presents, and fun, remember that the Prince of Peace came to spread peace and joy to all who believe in Him.

## Notes

1. Details of the Christmas story are in Luke 1-2 and Matthew 1:18-2:23.
2. Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973 printing of the 1883 original), i:372.
3. Matthew 12:21 NLT.
4. Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence* (New York: Bantam Books, 1997), ix-x.
5. Luke 2:10-11 NLT.
6. Luke 2:13-14 NASB.
7. Matthew 1:19 NLT.
8. Matthew 1:21 NLT.
9. Philippians 2:6-9 NLT.

10. For more on evidence for Jesus, see [www.WhoIsJesus-Really.com](http://www.WhoIsJesus-Really.com) and [www.probe.org](http://www.probe.org).
11. For a summary of prophecies Jesus fulfilled, see Josh McDowell, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict* (San Bernardino, CA: Here's Life Publishers, 1979), 141-177.
12. Micah 5:2.
13. Matthew 2:1 NASB.
14. Isaiah 7:14 NIV.
15. Matthew 1:18, 22-25; Luke 1:27, 34.
16. Peter W. Stoner, *Science Speaks* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969), 99-112.
17. McDowell, op. cit., 62-63.
18. Frederic G. Kenyon, *The Bible and Archaeology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1940), 288; in McDowell, op. cit., 41. McDowell develops these points in pp. 39-41 ff.
19. John 3:16 NLT.

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## Are the Essene Gospels Real?

Dr. Michael Gleghorn

**Are the Essene gospels (Gospel of Peace) real? How can you witness to someone who believes these are truer than the Bible? I have a father who says he believes in Jesus, but not the Bible. He says a loving God will not condemn man as long as he does mostly good. He also rejects that Christ is the only way. I know we are saved by grace not works and that Jesus is**

**the way, but how do I explain and share the truth without arguing? My referring to the Bible only aggravates him since he rejects it as one of religion and man's creation.**

There are certainly many ancient "Gospels" that never made it into the Bible.

You can find out more about these on sites like the following:  
[wesley.nnu.edu/biblical\\_studies/noncanon/index.htm](http://wesley.nnu.edu/biblical_studies/noncanon/index.htm) and  
[www.gnosis.org/naghamm/nhl.html](http://www.gnosis.org/naghamm/nhl.html).

A search on the latter site for the "Gospel of Peace" produced no matches and I've actually never heard of this one. Regardless, however, the real questions we must ask are:

1. Who wrote these documents?
2. When were they written?
3. Are they historically reliable or trustworthy sources of information about Jesus and the early church?

Many of these documents were written by groups (like the Gnostics) who were later declared heretical by church councils and synods. They were written AFTER the time of the New Testament Gospels - sometimes by hundreds of years, sometimes by decades. And with the exception of certain portions of the Gnostic Gospel of Thomas, they're generally regarded as late, legendary, and historically unreliable sources of information about Jesus and His early followers.

If your father doesn't believe that the Bible is reliable, you might see if he's willing to read some books which give evidence that it is. A very good general introduction is "A General Introduction to the Bible: Revised and Expanded" by Norman Geisler and William Nix. A book on the Old Testament is "The Old Testament Documents: Are They Reliable & Relevant?" by Walter Kaiser. And F.F. Bruce wrote, "The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?" Many other good books exist, but if your father would be willing to carefully read any of these,

it would be a great start.

Regardless of whether he's willing to read such books or not, however, the best thing you can do is pray for him and model Christlike love toward him. The Lord can work wonderfully to soften men's hearts toward Christ and the Bible. Speak a good word for the Lord as you have opportunity, but mainly just pray for him and show him God's love. It's a powerful combination.

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn  
Probe Ministries

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

Rusty Wright

## **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.

## Guilty 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 Tappan NJ: Fleming H. Revell Publishers, 1968), 77.

12. McDowell, *New Evidence*.

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