

Three Types of Anxiety

Anxiety is part of the human condition. Ranging from mild apprehension and worry to crippling panic, anxiety touches each of our lives in some way. To help make sense of this common experience, this article will consider three types of anxiety:

1. **Spiritual Anxiety** – anxiety we feel when we are not putting our trust in God to deal with our circumstances.
2. **Situational Anxiety** – a normal response to threatening situations.
3. **Anxiety Disorders** – a commonly occurring category of mental-health disorders and conditions.

Spiritual Anxiety

The Bible specifically addresses worry that manifests in lack of trust in God. It is a result of incorrect thinking and perspective in that we focus on our circumstances rather than focusing on God's ability to deal with our circumstances. Often, we believe we are trying to fix something that is beyond our control. Spiritual anxiety can result when we project our minds into the future (i.e., future tripping) and we focus on fearful outcomes instead of God's ability to provide. Also important to consider is that while unbelievers live with the very real fear of the judgment of God, God's children are encouraged to have reverential fear and not anxiety toward Him.

Proverbs 23:7 says, "For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he." It follows then, that if we are thinking anxious thoughts ("Oh, no. What if I fail?", "What do they think of me?"), then we are going to experience anxious feelings. Our responsibility is to shift our thinking. Note David's response to stressors in his life and how he turned toward God while fears and distress were occurring.

Psalm 56:3-4 "What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee. In God I will praise his word, in God I have put my trust; I will not fear what flesh can do unto me."

Psalm 118:5-6 "I called upon the LORD in distress: the LORD answered me, and set me in a large place. The LORD is on my side; I will not fear: what can man do unto me?"

Matthew 6:25-34 records the longest section of Jesus' teaching about anxiety. Note that five times in that passage He gives instruction about one's thought life (e.g., "take no thought"). Truly, worry is a battle in the mind.

²⁵ "Therefore I say unto you, **Take no thought** for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?"

²⁷ "Which of you **by taking thought** can add one cubit unto his stature?"

²⁸ "And why **take ye thought** for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin:"

³¹ "Therefore **take no thought**, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?"

³⁴ "Take **therefore no thought** for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."

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Situational Anxiety

Everyone feels scared and is anxious at one time or another. God designed the nervous system of our bodies with two branches: (1) an **alarm system** that helps us respond to threats and stressors and (2) a **calming system** which helps us to relax and quiet our bodies and minds. Anxiety involves a response of both your body and mind to an actual or perceived stressor. It is helpful when it is a short-lived response to a stressor or threat. Think of the following examples: (a) You see a young child walk into the road, notice a car is coming, and run to the aid of the child. (b) You are walking in a park and see a rattlesnake and freeze in place so as to not get bitten. (c) You are in a store, hear a gunshot and duck for cover. In these cases, anxiety is a God-given, natural response to a situation or stimulus your brain interprets as threatening.

Anxiety Disorders

Anxiety becomes problematic when it is not related to realistic fears, becomes a chronic pattern, or when it interferes with normal functioning. When a diagnosable anxiety disorder is present, an individual wishes he or she could stop the anxiety but cannot. Some common anxiety disorders include:

- Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD)
- Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)
- Panic Disorder
- Social Anxiety Disorder

All of these conditions are manageable with proper treatment. If you are experiencing an anxiety disorder, you are not alone. Don't let shame and isolation keep you from getting help. It is important to recognize anxiety disorders are *afflictions*. Just like you would have compassion for someone with a physical illness or malady, it is important to have that same type of compassion for individuals (including yourself) dealing with anxiety disorders. For more information about anxiety, go to the ACCFS website at www.accounseling.org/mentalhealth or call ACCFS to talk with an ACCFS counselor.