

Defeating Anxiety

By Paul Meier, M.D.

When terrorists struck the Twin Towers of New York City on 9-11-01, I was stunned like the rest of America and the world. I stayed up late watching the news and woke up the next morning with so much grief and fear that my muscles were very tense and I could barely breathe comfortably. I've never had a panic attack, but being a psychiatrist, I've seen hundreds of them and I knew I was on the brink of one.

Following is some information that may be helpful to those suffering from anxiety.

- ▶ People who have a strong faith in God's ultimate sovereignty and love fare better than those who see this life as "all there is."
- ▶ People who can admit their fears, anger, sadness, and other emotions also fare better.
- ▶ People who have a strong support group (close family, healthy church life, intimate friends who know all their secrets and love them anyway, etc.) also fare better. My daughter Cheryl (a psychologist in at one of our California clinics) and I wrote a book on the art of biblically loving and being loved entitled *Unbreakable Bonds*. James 5:16 says that if we confess our faults one to another, we will be healed. People come from around the world to attend our Day Programs where they confess their faults and unresolved grief to a small group of other clients and therapists. It causes profound healing in a short time, as the Bible promises. Still, though, some individuals take longer to heal than others.
- ▶ People who grew up in open, loving, healthy families fare better than people with various kinds of emotional, physical, or sexual abuse in their childhood. The terrorist acts of 9-11 caused painful flashbacks, nightmares, and panic attacks in people who had been terrorized by their own private "Osama Bin Ladens" (mean, selfish parents, rapists, and various other "jerks") in their pasts.
- ▶ Non-perfectionists fare better than perfectionists. Any changes, better or worse, tend to upset extreme perfectionists who like everything to be in a safe routine they can count on to have no surprises. Others are not born perfectionists, but become excessively so because of childhood abuses. The more out-of-control you feel growing up (alcoholic, abusive parent, controlling parent, etc.), the more controlling and perfectionistic you naturally become to compensate for your fears. For example, in most families the mom and dad have limited insight into their own faults, so they get more abusive with whatever child reminds them unconsciously of the faults they don't see in themselves.

Anxiety is the fear of finding out the truth about your own unconscious thoughts, feelings and motives (rage, shame, fear of rejection, fear of death, intense sadness, etc.). Perfectionists have more fear, anxiety, depression, panic, headaches, "chronic fatigue syndrome," and fear of medications (and imagined and real side effects). In fact, if you have a specific phobia, such as a fear of elevators, then ride one on purpose an hour a day until the apprehension ends.

So insight into our fears and dealing with them biblically is the primary cure for anxiety. One technique that helps is to carry around a 3 x 5 card, and whenever you start to worry about something, write the topic down on the card and promise yourself to worry about that on purpose later, at a certain time that night. As you do that throughout the day, you have a worry-free day. At the promised time, pull out the list and pray about each of the topics, thinking of your best-guess solution. Now your worries have become constructive and helpful as you take them all to Jesus.

Some people need medications to relieve the unbearable pain of these attacks, but most can overcome these with a year or two of outpatient weekly therapy from a well-trained psychologist, or several weeks of intensive therapy in a Day Program. Quick or slow, these pains of fear are always relievable.

But some fear is healthy. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Fear Him, love Him, and trust Him to help you cope with your anxiety and fear.

For more information on overcoming anxiety, read *Fear Less for Life*, co-authored by Dr. Meier

