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# Goodbye Anxiety

**The Power of the Anxious Person**

**Finding Purpose Greater than Fear**



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# The Power of the Anxious Person

**Principle 1: God's power is made perfect in our weakness.** "...he (God) said to me (Apostle Paul), 'My grace is sufficient for you, my power is made perfect in weakness....That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.'" (2 Corinthians 12: 9-10)

**Principle 2: God can work powerfully through our weaknesses, even when we are stressed and anxious.** "I (Apostle Paul) came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on man's wisdom, but on God's power." (1 Corinthians 2:3-5)

**Principle 3: God made us each with a unique personality to use to serve Him.** "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." (Ephesians 2:10)

## Characteristics Commonly Shared by People who Suffer from Stress and Anxiety:

### **Anxiety or Energy?**

The same nervous energy that causes anxiety, panic attacks, and stress-related symptoms can also fuel peak performances onstage, in sports, or in your job.

*"Nerves provide me with energy. They work for me. It's when I don't have them, when I feel at ease, that I get worried." - Mike Nichols*

### **Imagining Stress or Success?**

A gifted imagination can be used to create, invent, picture successes, or solve problems. It can also be used to scare yourself or stress yourself out by picturing the worst possible scenarios.

*"Panic is a sudden desertion of us, and a going over to the enemy of our imagination." - Christian Nestell Bovee*

### **Emotional Sensitivity or Insight?**

Negative emotions can be interpreted as useful information, to help you become aware of anxiety-producing thought patterns so you can change them. In this way, sensitive emotions (anxiety, fear, guilt, anger, etc.) are a gift, or tool for personal growth that people with less sensitive emotions do not possess.

*"Emotion, which is suffering, ceases to be suffering as soon as we form a clear and precise picture of it." - Dr. Viktor Frankl, from Man's Search for Meaning*

### **Being Controlling or Being in Control?**

A strong drive for control can be a blessing when used to control what you can control – your thinking. The drive for control only causes stress and anxiety when focused on things beyond your control (other people's behavior, external circumstances). By controlling your thoughts, you achieve true control.

*"Our thoughts are not merely reactions to events; they change what ensues." - Martin Seligman, from Learned Optimism*

### **Perfectionism or Positive Expectations?**

Positive expectations can help you set and reach worthwhile goals and achieve God's will for your life – as long as you don't let your sense of self-worth rely on meeting unrealistic expectations.

*"The greatest mistake you can make in life is to be continually fearing you will make one."  
- Elbert Hubbard, from The Notebook*

### **Worry or Action-Planning?**

Worrying, to some degree, just means you care about something. The problem is, when you are worrying your mind is in action and your body is not. The trick to using worry to your advantage is to reverse this equation. Worry can be a powerful source of motivation to take action.

Worry is also the sign of an intelligent, analytical mind. Stupid people don't worry about much. An analytical mind can be used to analyze solutions as easily as it can be used to analyze problems.

*"Problems do not really exist. Problems are simply illusions, they are just decisions waiting to be made." -  
Dr. Robert Schuller*

### **Hypochondria or Healthy Living?**

A high level of concern about health is not necessarily a bad thing, It can be used as motivation to live a healthy lifestyle instead of becoming a hypochondriac and obsessively worrying about your health.

*"Don't chain your worries to your body. The burden soon becomes heavy and your health will give too much of itself to pick up the extra load." - Astrid Alauda, from Dyspeptic Enlightenment*

### **Compassion or Compulsive People Pleasing?**

A strong desire to help others is a gift, as long as you don't take too much responsibility for other people's problems without proper boundaries.

A major difference between healthy compassion and the compulsive people-pleasing lies in the source of motivation and the outcome. People-pleasing is motivated by a strong need for approval and affirmation and just leads to feeling overwhelmed, tired, and more anxious. Healthy compassion is motivated by true empathy and caring – a genuine spirit of giving – and leads to a deep sense of peace.

*"Compassion is the sometimes fatal capacity for feeling what it is like to live inside somebody else's skin."  
– Fredrick Buechner*

## Finding Purpose Greater than Fear

**God has a unique purpose for each one of us. Discovering God's purpose and living to fulfill it brings a deep sense of peace.**

*"Courage is not the absence of fear, but rather the judgement that something else is more important than fear." – Ambrose Redmoon*

*"For God did not give us a spirit of timidity (fear), but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline." - 2 Timothy 1:7*

*"May the God of peace...equip you with everything good for doing His will, and may He work in you what is pleasing to Him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory for ever and ever." (adapted from Hebrews 13:21)*

<b>Fulfilling Personal Goals, Meeting, or Respond to External Pressures</b>	<b>Fulfilling God's Purpose for Your Life</b>
Anxiety over outcomes you can't control	Peace in obeying God (which you can control)
Fear of failing (letting yourself or others down) may be greater than sense of purpose	Purpose is greater than any fear
Fear of rejection	God's perfect love drives out fear (1 John 4:18)
Fear or insecurity about what others think of you or how they might judge your ability when you make mistakes	God's grace is sufficient (2 Corinthians 12:9)
Stress from doing things you feel like you have to do	Joy found in doing things that your heart is into
Stress from trying to do things you may not be gifted to do	Joy found in using your gifts (Hebrews 13:21)
Worry over how circumstances or events might negatively affect you	Freedom of selflessness
Stress from striving for personal rewards or recognition	Peace in glorifying God
Fear of not getting what you want	Joy of serving, giving to others

## 1. The Power of Purpose

### ***How Purpose Can Make the Difference Between Life and Death***

When I was housebound with agoraphobia, I found great inspiration in reading *Man's Search for Meaning* by Dr. Viktor Frankl, a Jewish psychiatrist who survived the horrors of the Nazi concentration camps. For approximately two years, Frankl and his fellow prisoners lived with the daily specters of hunger, frostbite, disease, exhaustion, and possible death. They were forced to work long days in the snow, digging tunnels or laying railway tracks, clothed only in rags and surviving on ten ounces of bread and two pints of soup per day. Many of the men suffered from edema, or swelling of the feet, which made walking through the snow extremely painful. Many also suffered from typhus, caused by poor hygiene and malnutrition. Once the Gestapo deemed a prisoner unable to work, he was sent to his death in the gas chambers.

Perhaps the worst type of suffering in the concentration camps was psychological. Frankl and his fellow Jewish prisoners were stripped of their identities and possessions, separated from their families, shaved of their body hair, and defined only by a number.

In the end, only one in twenty-six of Frankl's fellow prisoners survived the concentration camps. According to Frankl's observations, the difference between death and survival was not physical strength, youth, or good health. Dr. Frankl stated: "Some prisoners of a less hardy make-up often seemed to survive camp life better than did those of a robust nature."

The greatest factor in survival was an individual's sense of purpose or meaning in life. Frankl writes, "Any attempt to restore a man's inner strength in the camp had first to succeed in showing him some future goal."

Those of us who suffer from anxiety and stress are in a prison and need to break free. The difference is that our prison is psychological, not physical, and we have the power to set ourselves free. If a strong sense of purpose, or meaning in life, is powerful enough to carry a person through the horrors of the Nazi concentration camps, a sense of purpose can lift us above the symptoms of anxiety and stress, to a better life beyond.

### **Terry's Story**

I've known many people with anxiety disorders, including agoraphobia, who made major strides toward recovering when they felt like they absolutely needed to do something.

One agoraphobic I worked with, whom I will call Terry, said that exposure helped her the most in recovery, but not systematic exposure. She said that what helped was real world, "I have to do this," "I have no choice" type of exposure.

When I first spoke with Terry, she was barely leaving her house. Later in her recovery, she could go shopping with a safe person for about an hour or two on a good day. That's when her husband went to the hospital.

I forgot to mention hospitals were one of Terry's worst fears. However, when her husband had to be in one for two nights, she was able to stay with him for most of that time.

I'm not saying that Terry didn't feel anxiety during her hospital visit. I am saying that her anxiety did not get out of control or turn into full blown panic. But even more importantly, she learned that she was capable of staying away from home and facing one of her worst fears if she really needed to.

It's not uncommon for someone with agoraphobia to rise to the occasion like this when something becomes more important than the fear. That's why I consider motivation a key to not only recovering from agoraphobia, but also in overcoming panic attacks, anxiety symptoms, and living above the stresses of day-today life.

### **Daniel's Story**

*Read Daniel 6.*

Daniel was motivated by a sense of purpose that was greater than his fear (Daniel 6:10). His relationship with and mission from God was more important than his fear of being killed by lions. Daniel's purpose was to use his gift from God, to be God's spokesman in Babylon, to bring glory to God by interpreting the King's dreams and prophesy about the future. He continued to pray three times a day, even when he knew it would threaten his life.

Daniel (in the lion's den) was calm but the King (in his palace) was not. This tells us that an internal sense of purpose can be stronger than external situations in determining whether an individual experiences peace or fear. The King did not have peace. He was more worried about his responsibility for what happened than Daniel was. Daniel found peace and fulfillment in living out his purpose for God.

### **Stephen's Story**

People often ask me if there was a turning point in my recovery from agoraphobia. There were many turning points, but the night I found a new purpose for living – in one of my darkest hours of fear – changed my life.

In complete and utter desperation, I prayed to God that if I could be freed from the bondage of fear, I would use my freedom and whatever abilities God gave me to help others in times of suffering. I didn't know it at the time, but changing my reason for living from meeting personal goals to serving God by serving others made all the difference. My new sense of purpose gave me a source of motivation strong enough to face my fear. Motivation that came from inspiration, not desperation.

### **Question for Reflection**

You can rise above fear, panic, anxiety, and stress when you find motivation deep inside to do it. It's easier to do this in a short-term situation, like taking a loved one to the hospital. But what if you could live your whole life this way? What would happen if you found a reason for living that was so consuming that it made anxiety and stress irrelevant – something you were determined to do or accomplish no matter what. What would happen if you found a purpose greater than your fear?

## 2. The Path to Purpose

***Mere excitement does not mean something is God's will for you.***

Everything we get excited about is not God's purpose for our lives. Proverbs 14:12 says "There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death."

Have you ever been excited about something, thought it was God's will, and it just didn't turn out right?

We will be excited about God's purpose for us, too. It's just that we have the capacity to get excited about things that are not God's purpose also. Assuming something is God's purpose for you just because you are excited about it can set you up for disappointment, in addition to anxiety and stress, when it doesn't turn out right

***Prayer is the starting point of knowing God's will....***

*"If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all."* James 1:5

*"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future, Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart." Jeremiah 29:11-13.*

**But the answer to prayer is not always clear.** Have you ever prayed and prayed about something and just got more confused? That's because asking God something is the starting point, but.....

***You still need to know how to recognize the answer.***

So how do I know God's will for me? Well. God's purpose for you is going to be consistent with the Bible. The Bible helps us recognize the answers to prayer.

**1) What God wants you to do, you will be able to do.**

- God gives us all of us different spiritual gifts (Romans 12:4-8, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4:8-15)
- There are different kinds of working but the same God works all of them in all men (1 Cor. 12:6)
- Spiritual gifts are manifestations of the Spirit for the common good. (1 Cor. 12:7)
- God gives us natural abilities, too. When God wanted a tabernacle built, he provided craftsmen whom he had given skill in cutting and setting stones, woodworking, making artistic designs with gold and silver, and all kinds of crafts. (Exodus 31:1-7).
- **God equips us with everything we need to do His will** and fulfill our purpose in life. Hebrews 13:21.

A purpose that we are not gifted for is probably our own purpose not God's purpose. Trying to fulfill a purpose we are not gifted to do leads to fear and insecurity. Fulfilling God's purpose leads to peace and confidence.

When gifts don't match purpose = fear of failing

When gifts match purpose = confidence in ability

To discover your gifts: 1) ask God, 2) ask other people, 3) try to do something and see if you are able.

## 2) What God wants you to do, you will be motivated to do. Your heart will be in it.

- If you earnestly ask God what He wants you to do, God will put His will on your heart.
- The Bible also says that if we trust and delight ourselves in God, God will give us the desires of our heart. (Psalms 37:3-4).
- The Bible says your heart is the “wellspring of life” (Proverbs 4:23).
- The Bible uses the word Heart to describe your desires. Hopes, interests, ambitions, dreams, and affections (Rick Warren, Purpose Drive Life).
- When you are doing God’s purpose for you will be enthusiastic and effective – it will not feel like an obligation or something you have to do. Doing God’s will will cause your heart to sing.

## God’s will for your life is something you look forward to doing and will want to do no matter what.

We are not afraid to do things our heart is really into. When operating within God’s purpose – fear melts away. (Example: Disciples were too scared to stick around after Jesus’ crucifixion, then later shared faith boldly, even at the cost of death).

Many of us spend too much time doing things our heart is not into – out of obligation, out of fear of what might happen if we didn’t do it. When we do things out of obligation, we are letting ourselves be motivated by fear. Fear of what might happen if we didn’t do it. Fear of what others think.

## 3) What God wants you to do, God will prepare you for.

- God allows experiences in our lives to equip us to fulfill our purpose. Fear goes away when you are well-prepared for something.
- Biblical example: Paul was extremely well-schooled in the Hebrew Scriptures before writing the New Testament letters.
- The Bible says, He comforts us in our troubles so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. (2 Cor. 1:4)

What has your life experience prepared you for? Family, education, job, ministries, pain.

## 4) God’s purpose for you will benefit others.

*“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.....Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” (Matthew 22:37, 39-40)*

Dr. Victor Frankl (in *Man’s Search for Meaning*) observed the importance of finding a purpose that benefits others while in the concentration camps. Each prisoner faced the daily decision to keep working despite hunger, fatigue, and illness, or to give up, stop working, and be sent to the gas chamber.

Frankl observed that men who felt a responsibility to a wife, children, or other loved ones were least likely to give up hope, as were those who were determined to complete a creative work for the benefit of others. About this, he writes, “A man who becomes conscious of the responsibility he bears toward a human being who affectionately waits for him, or to an unfinished work, will never be able to throw away his life.”

## **A purpose that benefits others will provide the motivation to move in the face of fear.**

Though as humans we have the tendency to focus on meeting our own needs, we weren't created to be self-serving organisms. We weren't created to live our lives focused on what we want and how we can get it. That is why life can feel unnatural, strained, and stressful when we choose to live this way.

### **Questions for discovering purpose:**

What has God given me the ability to do?  
What has God given me a passion (strong desire) to do?  
What has God allowed my life experiences to prepare me for?  
How can God use me to benefit others?

### **3. The Product of Purpose**

#### **Finding Peace in the Process Instead of Anxiety Over the Outcome.**

The main benefit to finding a purpose greater than fear is finding peace and fulfillment in the process of living out your purpose instead of waiting anxiously for the outcomes of your efforts.

Before I had agoraphobia, my life had been focused on doing whatever I needed to do to achieve what I wanted for myself. This perspective on life actually created fear, because I lived with fear that I might fail, and let myself and others down.

In making my promise to God, I let go of anxiety over reaching personal goals and found purpose in giving to others. This gave me peace in the process of living, as I began to live my life according to what I have to give.

When I focused my life on what I wanted to get, I felt anxiety from the possibility of not getting it. My sense of security relied totally on the outcome of my efforts and failure was a fearful possibility.

When I choose to focus on what I have to give, I live a more meaningful life because I am living according to the natural skills and abilities I was given to share with others. I find peace in the process of what I do because I can succeed in living out my purpose regardless of the outcome of my efforts. In giving to others, I find deep and lasting purpose in life, a purpose that is greater than any fear of failing. The ability to write, speak, and the story of overcoming that I have to tell, are gifts I was given by my Creator, and a gift I offer to you. Not only does using these gifts bring peace to my life now, but the desire to help others gave me a sense of peace in the process of overcoming my fear, even when I was still housebound with agoraphobia.

If you wait for the outcome of your efforts to feel fulfillment, you will intensify fear – especially the fear of failure. There are factors outside your control in every endeavor, and if you place your ultimate hopes on those factors, you will live with anxiety.

Learn to find peace in the process instead of anxiety over the outcome. The process of living is entirely under your control. If you live in pursuit of your life's purpose, your efforts are meaningful whether or not you succeed, and you have nothing to fear. The greatest sense of peace available to human beings is that which comes from spending your life on a worthy cause. If you do this, you can live a life full of meaning and without fear.

The ability to achieve purpose in life is never outside of your control. In the concentration camps, Dr. Frankl and his fellow prisoners were challenged day by day, hour by hour, to find meaning in a seemingly hopeless situation. While most men in the concentration camp believed that the real opportunities of life had passed, others made a victory of the experiences by choosing to live with purpose despite their circumstances.

The men who found purpose despite bad circumstances sometimes gave what little food they had to another prisoner. They made it their mission to offer encouragement and hope to their fellow inmates even though they, themselves, were living with the same challenges. As Frankl put it, men who found the “why” for their existence were able to bear almost any “how.”

It is my sincerest hope that you will find a purpose for living that will set you free to live above anxiety and stress – one that is greater than your darkest fear.