

The Reality of Fear & Anxiety

Isaiah 41:10 "fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you. I will help you. I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."

A virus that began thousands of miles away in Wuhan, China, brings the reality of fear and anxiety home for all of us. Fear is an emotion that powerfully energizes our nervous system. When we experience fear, the amygdala in our brain is activated. The amygdala is the part of our brain designed to be on guard and protect us from fearful things and people. Fear impacts all of us in various ways. The command, "fear not," is the most repeated in the Bible. Yet, it is not always the easiest to do.

Many people I counsel struggle with various degrees of fear and anxiety. Their distress ranges from generalized anxiety to the impact of past trauma and living with chronic PTSD. I try to help them understand the physical, emotional, and spiritual struggles they are experiencing, and guide them through a process to help address their fears.

In the coming weeks, I will be discussing several topics related to this complex issue. ***First, I would like to address anxiety.*** You might be asking, what is the difference between fear and anxiety? Fear has a known object (sometimes not consciously remembered) related to a past or present experience. When a person experiences anxiety, they may not always know the cause.

What is anxiety all about?

- Anxiety is a sense of being out of control.
- It is a fear of the unknown.
- It is an assumption that bad things will occur.
- It is a sense of uncertainty, tension, or uneasiness about a future event, but not always sure of what the specific activity or thing feared.
- It is an uncomfortable feeling of dread characterized by nervousness, tension, and apprehension.
- Anxiety is extremely common in unhealthy relationships.
- It can be associated to past trauma relating to a feeling of being out of control or trapped.
- Anxiety occurs when a person becomes afraid to address a negative situation and emotion inside.
- It is an adaptive feeling of high nervousness experienced by all of us, to something unpleasant and generally leads to some action to relieve the feeling.
- It can be free-floating, a term used to describe a lack of focus on a specific target. Unlike a fear that develops in reaction to a particular (real or imagined) danger, anxiety can have no apparent cause of which the person is aware.
- An exaggerated state of anxiety, resulting in a profound disturbance in the ability to function, is called panic.

What can I do to help myself with anxiety?

- **Daily remind yourself that you are God's child, and he will take care of you for eternity.**

Luke 12:32, "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

- **Acknowledge your feelings and express them in prayer.**

Philippians 4:6,7 "do not be anxious about anything, 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 understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

- **When anxiety starts to surface, stop and ask yourself, "What negative thoughts am I thinking?". Attempt to see the circumstance from a positive perception.**

Philippians 4:8 "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things."

- **Address double-mindedness: Plan A (God's will) vs. Plan B (my will) thinking. We must be careful to align our thoughts and surrender our will to God's plan for our life.**

1 Peter 5:6,7 "Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you."

- **Practice self-awareness and assess your thoughts. What do you believe about this event or situation? What are the lies you are believing or feeling? What is the truth of God's Word that speaks the truth? Are you under a spiritual attack? Separate facts, assumptions, and feelings.**

1 Peter 5:8,9 "Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings."

- **Write down and share with God your feelings and thoughts in a diary or a notebook.**

Psalms 141:1 " O Lord, I call upon you; hasten to me! Give ear to my voice when I call to you!"

- **Read and personalize the Psalms every day.**

Psalm 61:1-3 "Hear my cry, O God, listen to my prayer; from the end of the earth I call to you when my heart is faint. Lead me to the rock that is higher than I, for you have been my refuge, a strong tower against the enemy."

- **Plan how you will respond step-by-step if a panic attack occurs. Work on being self-aware at the onset of your trigger. Understand what your trigger is. Take your thoughts captive. Take time to relax and do something that you enjoy. Practice relaxation exercises by breathing deeply and slowly.**

2 Corinthians 10:5 "We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ,"

- **Learn the importance of mutual emotional regulation. Talk to a trusted friend who will listen and understand you when you are anxious. It can help you to have greater clarity and return to joy.**

Galatians 6:2 "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ."

Rev. Jeffrey Pokone, has been a Biblical counselor and Center Director with the Indiana Biblical Counseling Center since 1998. He counsels in the following areas; marriage, trauma and abuse, sexual addictions, spiritual conflicts, and relationships. Jeff has been married for over 30 years to his wife Suzette and has five adult children.