**ANXIETY
*In the multitude of my anxieties within me,*
*Your comforts delight my soul. Psalm 94:19***

The Psalmist David was a mighty warrior and a great king. He was fearless on the bat- tle field, yet he struggled with inner turbulence, and sought comfort in the Lord. As high- lighted in Psalm 94:19, he says, *“In the multitude of my anxieties within me, your com- forts delight my soul.”*

You would think a giant-slayer like David would never be anxious, but in the Bible, he talks to the Lord about his anxieties and fears. He admits to experiencing a multitude of them, and provides an inspiring example.

Personally, I am comforted by David’s candor. His Psalms are full of complaints, but they end with faith and promise. He delighted in the Lord in the midst of his anxieties.

**Our Struggle With Anxiety**

My mother died before I was five, and my earliest memories are of her lying in bed, and people praying over her. She was diagnosed with breast cancer when I was very young, and she didn’t get treatment, because she believed God would heal her. My dad as pre- occupied with her illness, dealing with his own grief, and busy with the church he pas- tored.

I was the little kid in the corner of the bedroom, alone. Then, she died. They laid her out in the mortuary in the blue satin coffin my sister and I had chosen. As we went through the funeral for our own mother, I had my first attack of anxiety.

After my mother’s death, my dad resigned the church he pastored and began a nomadic, revivalist lifestyle, preaching where he could. I was shipped away to live with my unmarried middle-aged aunt and my grandfather in a very small town high in the Colorado mountains. We thumped through deep snow in 40 below zero temperatures to the country schoolhouse where my aunt taught.

Eventually, my father returned, along with a new step-mother. Ridiculed, scolded and shamed by her, I never developed self-confidence, and my anxiety got much worse. Most of my childhood, I remember being anxious,. The school telephoned my parents on the first day in my new school once our family settled again with new step-mom, “She’s crying, come pick her up!” I

Later in life I became anxious about being anxious. I sought counsel from well-meaning christians. Under their gentle scolding I felt worse. They quoted scripture— “Give no thought for tomorrow, for tomorrow will take care of itself,” They made me feel like seek- ing help in these matters of anxiety meant I did not trust God.

**Understanding Anxiety**

In Hebrew, the word for anxiety is *sagnaphim*. It means “like the bough of a tree blowing with the wind,” and seems an appropriate way to describe a feeling of being out of con- trol, and thrown to the will of whatever wind is blowing. We can imagine boughs of a tree blowing in a strong wind, leaves falling, branches blustering against each other, tangled. The mind and body get caught up in this tangle of chaos, and anxiety, or *sag- naphim* is the result.

In our mental activity, especially in the middle of the night, random thoughts float through our brains, elusive and irrepressible. Are you sometimes surprised at what you worry about in the middle of the night? It seems like these issues never surface during the day, when the rational mind is more in control. Of course, thinking anxiously about the death of your cat – when the cat is not sick – waits until you are desperate to let go into sleep. We may think, “Where did that come from? How can I stop these troubling thoughts?!”

Psychologists say there is a difference between anxiety and worry. Worry is specific, anxiety more diffuse, and from a visceral standpoint, we tend to experience worry in our heads, anxiety in our bodies. Worry is something you can do something about, whereas anxiety is a general feeling of dread and chaos, or fear.

Have you ever lost track of your passport, on the day of your international flight? You’re due to leave for the airport in less than 10 minutes, and tearing apart drawers to locate that crucial travel document, you might be worried about arriving on time. It seems logi- cal to worry in that circumstance.

With anxiety, the specific worry tends to spiral out into general apprehensiveness, fear and nervousness about travel. Instead of enjoyment of travel there is an unnamed dread of the unknown, of terrors awaiting.

I struggled with anxiety in my years of travel throughout the world, especially when I traveled internationally with my baby. We'd board planes in Asia, India and Africa with a three-month-old baby, and I'd be the one crying. Irrational thoughts of anxiety over- whelmed me, *“My baby is going to die in Africa and so am I! My mother died didn’t she?”* Then I would chide myself, “Be a brave missionary”.

**Wonderful Things Happen Too**

Bad things happened to me in childhood, so I expected more bad things to continue, yet none of them did. In my mind, I lived with the blowing branches, that amorphous world of anxious thoughts, always feeling dread just around the corner. The worst part was that I needed the help of the Lord as many of us do, but I had a hard time reaching out for it, because having irrational anxiety is something we don’t want to confess. People who knew me back then never knew I had anxious thoughts.

Many have experienced truly horrific events in their lives, traumas, death, illness, loss, pain, rejection, divorce. The peace of God described here is not a normal response to life’s nightmarish events. Rather, it surpasses all understanding. This means it comes from outside ourselves, and is beyond our human responses and reasoning.

*Be anxious for nothing, 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 minds through Christ Jesus.* (Phi 4:6-7)

This verse reminds us that the peace of God will guard our hearts. We may ask, “How does that work?” It works miraculously through a growing trust in God. Supernatural peace stands like a sentry over our inner person. It comes from an other-worldly place to provide calm and serenity in the midst of mental chaos.

*"My peace I give you, not as the world gives. Let not your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful.”*
(John 14:27)

The peace of God’s is the soldier stationed at our mind’s entrance. Thinking of the watchman around my thoughts helps me through the night. It’s the security guard sta- tioned at the gate to protect my restful slumber. When anxiety follows us throughout life, the answer to the problem is to take those thoughts in prayer to God, and peace is promised. I often find myself listening to audio recordings of Psalms as I fall asleep, re- membering David’s struggles.

*“You have seen me tossing and turning through the night. You have collected all my tears and preserved them in your bottle. You have recorded every one of them in your book.” (Psalm 56:8)*

The Lord is the listener asking us what we’re feeling. He’s jotting it down. Instead of the Kleenex box, He collects our tears and saves them. He has miraculous powers to help us. As humans, we have this tumultuous inner world, and God cares enough to reach deeper and deeper into our subconscious to heal us. The Holy Spirit is the mighty com- forter, and we can feel God’s love washing over us like a father singing a lullaby to a fretful child.

God knows our psychology, and loves us despite all our weaknesses, whether mental, emotional, or physical. Unlike the psychiatrist, however, He has miraculous powers to help us. As humans, we have this tumultuous inner world, and God cares enough to reach deeper and deeper into our subconscious to heal us. The Holy Spirit is the mighty comforter, and we can feel God’s love washing over us like a father singing a lullaby to a fretful child.

*“The Lord your God in your midst; The Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness; He will quiet you with His love; He will rejoice over you with singing.” Zeph 3:17*

Anxiety is the hamster on a whirling wheel. These nebulous floating thoughts torment us. Maybe they rise from our subconscious? We know they’re irrational. When the anx- ious thoughts of our mind are leaves falling, and tangled branches blustering against each other, He sees the struggle. Christ Jesus enters the storm of these untruths and says, *“Peace, be still.”*

**Refuge from Anxiety**

The peace of our Savior reminds us that our thoughts are just thoughts, and that truth is found in the promises of God. David sought to dwell safely in closeness to the Lord and we too much seek refuge in the temple of the Lord.

*One thing I have desired of the Lord, That will I seek:*
*That I may dwell in the house of the Lord All the days of my life,*
*To behold the beauty of the Lord, And to inquire in His temple.*
*5 For in the time of trouble*
*He shall hide me in His pavilion;*
*In the secret place of His tabernacle He shall hide me;*
*He shall set me high upon a rock. (Psalm 27:4-5)*

Anxiousness is a part of the human condition. It simply means we live in a body with a brain, a nervous system, and emotions we can’t always control. Painful memories and experiences burn into our subconscious and unconscious mind. But He can heal the scars.

The peace given to us by the Lord our God is not natural, or human, but a supernatural gift. We receive it by pouring our fears out to the Lord, and meditating on what He has to say. The Holy Spirit will bar the doors of our mind. Every time an irrational, unbiblical thought blows through, the guard says, “Go away. You cannot have entrance into this space.”

When I remember You on my bed,

*I meditate on You in the night watches.*

Psalm 63:6

*@2019 Mary Katherine Neely, All Rights Reserved*

