

A N X I E T Y

KNOWING
GOD'S PEACE

31-DAY DEVOTIONALS FOR LIFE

PAUL TAUTGES

In this little book, Paul Tautges takes his readers on a large and far-flung journey through Scripture's many different words about anxiety. He doesn't stop there, however. This devotional heavily emphasizes practical ways we can reflect on, and in many cases act on, the insights Tautges unearths in the passages he chooses. His relentless call to us to thoughtfully connect the many hopes we have in Christ with our daily experiences of fear and anxiety would be impossible for us to engage without the significant benefit to our faith and comfort that we find in Christ.

—**Alasdair Groves**, Executive Director, Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation (CCEF) New England; Director, CCEF School of Biblical Counseling

This devotional came at just the right time in my own life, as everyday worries and anxieties had nudged my gaze away from Jesus Christ. I'm thankful for this new resource from the pen of a fellow struggler who bravely and honestly wrestles with the perennial problem of anxiety. Read it each day and be comforted, convicted, and ultimately conformed into the image of Christ, who takes all our cares and burdens onto himself.

—**Jonathan Holmes**, Pastor of Counseling, Parkside Church, Chagrin Falls, Ohio; Founder and Executive Director, Fieldstone Counseling

Tautges, with vulnerable transparency, offers wise counsel in this small yet critical work on anxiety. He allows Scripture to define this raw and often paralyzing emotion as he finds deep and lasting hope in the powerful truths of God's Word. His gentle explanations and careful admonitions act as a guard and guide to all who wrestle with perpetual fear and anxious thoughts.

—**T. Dale Johnson**, Executive Director, Association of Certified Biblical Counselors; Associate Professor of Biblical Counseling, Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

I love the way Paul Tautges grabs anxiety by the horns, wrestles it to the ground, and defeats its insidious deception through clear, wise biblical counsel. He helps the reader to understand what anxiety is, how destructive it is, and how to successfully defeat it. Most of all, I'm impressed with the way that my friend offers concise, practical steps that empower the reader to overcome fear and anxiety. There is so much I love about this little book, and I give it a hearty double-thumbs-up!

—**Joni Eareckson Tada**, Founder/CEO, Joni and Friends
International Disability Center

One in five people suffer from chronic anxiety. Even more people experience episodes of anxiety. This month-long daily devotional offers biblical wisdom for this common problem. Paul Tautges, a respected pastor and counselor, has the experience and gospel focus to help the anxiety sufferer. He describes the nature of anxiety and brings the power of the gospel and the comforts of the Savior to bear on this problem. This is practical, accessible help for sufferers of anxiety.

—**Tedd Tripp**, Pastor; Author; Conference Speaker

A N X I E T Y

31-DAY DEVOTIONALS FOR LIFE

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DEEPAK REJU

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PAUL TAUTGES



P U B L I S H I N G

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Tips for Reading This Devotional

EARLY IN OUR marriage, my wife and I lived on the top floor of a town house, in a small one-bedroom apartment. Whenever it rained, leaks in the roof would drip through the ceiling and onto our floors. I remember placing buckets in different parts of the apartment and watching the water slowly drip, one drop at a time. I put large buckets out and thought, *It'll take a while to fill them.* The water built up over time, and often I was surprised at how quickly those buckets filled up, overflowing if I didn't pay close enough attention.

This devotional is just like rain filling up a bucket. It's slow, and it builds over time. Just a few verses every day. Drip. Drip. Drip. Just a few drops of Scripture daily to satiate your parched soul.

We start with Scripture. God's Word is powerful. In fact, it's the most powerful force in the entire universe.¹ It turns the hearts of kings, brings comfort to the lowly, and gives spiritual sight to the blind. It transforms lives and turns them upside down. We know that the Bible is God's very own words, so we read and study it to know God himself.

Our study of Scripture is practical. Theology should change how we live. It's crucial to connect the Word with your struggles. Often, as you read this devotional, you'll see the word *you* because Paul speaks directly to you, the reader. The readings contain a mixture of reflection questions and practical suggestions. You'll get much more from this experience if you answer the questions and do the practical exercises. Don't skip them. Do them for the sake of your own soul.

Our study of Scripture is worshipful. Anxiety can ruin your life. And, fundamentally, any struggle with anxiety is a worship problem. You might be preoccupied with financial struggles, sickness, troubles at work, a rebellious teenager, or some other problem. These things are the objects of your anxiety, and they consume a lot of your time and energy. Yet your anxiety is *first* a problem with God. Is the Lord really sovereign over your life? Does the peace of Christ reign in your heart? “We’re not going to have enough to pay the bills.” “I’ll be in pain for months.” “My boss hates me.” “My son just doesn’t care anymore.” There is a war in your heart, and your anxiety is a manifestation of that war. There is no inner peace, only turmoil, on many days. As pressures come from outside you, and worries bubble up within you, you realize that you can’t do battle on your own.

You’ve probably picked up this devotional because your anxiety is hurting your life. Let me commend you; that’s an important step. But let me also point out that defeating anxiety is not a matter of getting rid of our troubles (as helpful as it might be to get rid of some of them) or of finding healthy ways to manage our out-of-control emotions (though that’s useful too) but of first turning back to the Lord for his help. The Word points us to Christ, who rescues us from our anxiety and reorients our life. We can find rest. An inner peace comes through Christ.

“Take heart.” “Have courage.” “Do not be afraid.” These are common phrases in Scripture. There are no quick fixes when it comes to defeating anxiety. Fighting it will require orienting your entire life to Christ. Your goal in fighting your anxiety should always be worship of him.

If you find this devotional helpful (and I trust that you will!), reread it in different seasons of your life. Work through it this coming month, and then come back to it a year from now, to remind yourself how to do battle with your anxiety.

This devotional is *not* meant to be a comprehensive guide to

fighting anxiety. Good volumes are already written for that purpose. Buy them and make good use of them. You'll see several resources listed at the end of the book.

That's enough for now. Let's begin.

Deepak Reju

INTRODUCTION

When Panic Attacks

SIX YEARS AGO, I could not have written this book. I was a prisoner. Anxiety crippled me and held me captive. Satan took advantage of an extended season of depression I was going through that had been triggered by the impact of a myriad of difficulties in our church and family. Mounting pressure from every direction, along with my own angry response to it, collided to create a swirling storm of fear. I had experienced anxiety before, but never like this. I couldn't go on. Some days, I didn't even want to.

Twice I went to the emergency room showing symptoms of a heart attack. After my second trip to the ER, my physician sent me to a cardiologist to get blood work and a stress test. The tests determined that I hadn't had an actual heart attack (the kind that causes permanent damage to the heart muscle) but a stress-induced heart problem that causes only short-term harm.

The Mayo Clinic calls it *broken heart syndrome*¹—a temporary heart condition that is brought on by stressful situations or grievous loss. It involves a surge of stress hormones disrupting the heart's normal pumping function. This condition mimics a heart attack by causing a similar set of symptoms, including chest pain, shortness of breath, an irregular heartbeat, and generalized weakness. When this occurs, people believe they are having a heart attack. I did—twice, in less than a year. And what I experienced is more common than I knew.

Perhaps you can relate to one or more parts of my story. Perhaps not. Regardless, we all struggle with various forms of anxiety.

What does *your* anxiety look like? Is it mild worry? Or full-blown panic? Or something in between? Did you pick up this

devotional because feelings of anxiousness come and go—or because they are constant? No matter what your anxiety looks like, the Bible speaks truth and peace into your mind and heart. Scripture directly addresses the anxious heart in helpful ways.

Anxiety Is Entwined with Our Bodies

Anxiety is a persistent part of our human condition. It's so common that an estimated 23 million Americans suffer from panic attacks, while millions more identify themselves as having some form of anxiety disorder. It is helpful to realize how honestly the Scriptures uncover this side of human experience, shed light on the effect that anxiety has on our bodies (and vice versa), and fuel the faith that strengthens inner security and peace.

Thousands of years ago, Jewish patriarchs recognized the impact of powerful emotions on the body. For example, Jacob feared the possibility of premature death from deep sorrow and distress (see Gen. 37:35; 42:38; 44:29). When his son Judah pleaded for Joseph to release his youngest brother Benjamin, he specifically begged to be allowed to return Benjamin to his father. Judah said, “As soon as I come to your servant my father, and the boy is not with us, then, as his life is bound up in the boy’s life, as soon as he sees that the boy is not with us, he will die, and your servants will bring down the gray hairs of your servant our father with sorrow to Sheol”—that is, to the grave by premature death (Gen. 44:30–31).

The Bible also contains examples of the reverse happening—of anxiety being caused by physical suffering. The author of Psalm 102 pleaded with God to listen to him in his distress, which was not connected to his sin but occurred alongside his physical afflictions (see vv. 3–5). Job, too, is an example of this. As the result of immense loss and excruciating bodily pain, he experienced deep anxiety. “I have no peace, no quietness; I have no rest, but only turmoil” (Job 3:26 NIV). Even the apostle Paul experienced

burdens that were “beyond [his] strength” (2 Cor. 1:8). It does not take much imagination to see how his mental suffering was a consequence of physical suffering.²

Scripture Heals Our Souls

Not only is our physical frame custom-made by God, but so is our emotional makeup (see Ps. 139:13–14)!³ We are so amazingly designed by God that he should be exalted and praised—though the full interplay of our bodies and spirits, as well as the understanding of our beautiful and yet complicated emotions, remain mysterious to us.

One thing is clear, however: *we are always made up of body and soul . . . together . . . always*. Regardless of what physical elements may contribute to our anxiety, every mental or emotional struggle we experience is also an opportunity to develop our faith. Our souls are *always* in need of the Spirit’s ministry of grace and truth through the Word.

I’m not a physician, but I am a “soul doctor”—a pastor who wants to help you connect with the healing words of Scripture so that mental and emotional peace will reign in your heart, despite whatever physical or circumstantial challenges you face.

The Goal of This Book

When panic attacks, it truly does feel as if an enemy is attacking us. Debilitating fear strikes us out of nowhere. We don’t always know why we’re anxious. Though external pressures do act as triggers, and while some anxiety arises from physical problems, fundamentally there is something going on in our inner person. Fears and doubts hijack our peace, inner turmoil ensues, and our hearts pound.

“Anxiety in a man’s heart weighs him down, but a good word makes him glad” (Prov. 12:25). This proverb hardly needs

explanation. Anxiety in our hearts troubles our spirits, which in turn affects our bodies. Although anxiety sometimes arises from malfunctions in our bodies, this devotional addresses anxiety that is connected to the soul. Anxiety weakens us—it drags us down. But there is something that lifts us up and makes us glad: a good word—whether from God in Scripture or from a faithful friend.

In this book, I aim to bring you both. I want to bring you healing words by coming alongside you as an encouraging friend. I hope to enter your personal struggle with anxiety by allowing you to enter mine—to open a window to my heart in order to share biblical truths that the Lord continues to use in order to help bring me greater peace.

Peace is a recurring theme in this devotional; you will see it crop up again and again. I will help you to understand not only what a peaceful state of mind looks like but also how to maintain that state of mind by training the eyes of your heart to habitually look to the Lord. Additionally, I will help you to understand the connection between the peace *of* God and peace *with* God. In other words, the experience of the peace *of* God flows out of an ever-deepening awareness of being securely at peace *with* God through faith in his Son.

How We Will Get There

To reach the goal of knowing God's peace—not only in our heads but in our hearts—we will take a 31-day walk together. First we will *define* anxiety. I will do this by opening up Scripture's abundant pantry of truth in order to feed our souls. I will also shine a flashlight on the real-life experiences of men and women in the Bible who, like us, struggled with anxiety. Once this foundation of understanding is laid, we will look at the character of God and see how his promises speak to our anxiety. In the final and longest section, I will open a chest of biblical wisdom to show you practical ways you can *fight* anxiety.

It's really important for you to patiently press through the first part of this devotional. Just as, when you are building a house, the strength of the concrete foundation will determine the durability of the wooden structure, the better you understand what anxiety is (in part 1), the more successful you will be at knowing God's peace experientially as you apply his resources (in part 2) to the fight (in part 3).

So let's start walking. Together, let's ask God to renew our minds and to help us learn to trust him with our anxiety.

A Brief Word on Medication

IF YOU ARE experiencing the symptoms of a panic attack or broken heart syndrome, you should see your doctor right away for a thorough medical checkup in order to discover, or exclude, any physical problems that may be causing your symptoms of anxiety. The relationship between the body and soul is complex, and respecting medical counsel is wise. For some people, using a symptom-relieving medication for a limited time may help them to get control of their escalated emotional state. Others may find that the benefits of medication do not offset its side effects—or even that it has significant downsides.¹

For example, at one point, my physician believed that a short-term use of anxiety medication might help to pull me through a crisis and prevent further damage. However, instead of calming down my anxiety so that my body could begin to repair itself, the medication increased it dramatically—producing a sense of terror, impending doom, and even a desire for death. We set the medication aside and agreed that major, life-altering decisions were necessary instead. In contrast, Bob, another counselor and minister of the gospel, was meaningfully helped by medicine. In his story, he says, “The medicine helped stabilize me so that I could think rationally and apply biblical principles to my situation.”²

Mental fog often accompanies severe anxiety. Therefore, any decision that you make concerning the use or non-use of medication must be well-informed, humbly bathed in prayer and clothed in counsel, and under the guidance and supervision of your personal physician.

DEFINING ANXIETY

DAY 1

Anxiety Distracts Us

“Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?” (Matt. 6:25)

ANXIETY IS SO much a part of our lives that it’s natural for us to talk about it frequently. However, *defining* it, and understanding how it works, sometimes seems like trying to nail Jell-O to the wall. Anxiety is an emotion—but it’s more than a feeling. It often includes a physical reaction—but it’s more than that, too. So what *is* anxiety, exactly?

The writers of the New Testament employ two different, but related, words to refer to the experience that we call anxiety. They combine the noun *merimna*, which is usually translated “care,” with the verb *merizo*, which means to draw in different directions or distract. To be anxious, then, means to have a *distracting care*—to have our minds and hearts torn between two worlds. We see this in Jesus’s warning about thorns choking out the Word of God, which is intended to produce faith. He identifies these thorns as “the cares of the world” (Mark 4:19) or “the cares and riches and pleasures of life” (Luke 8:14). Anxious cares are typically tied to our earthly lives and are most often temporal, not eternal.

These distracting cares divide our mental energy and cloud our spiritual vision; they keep us focused on the here-and-now instead of on the future-promised-but-not-yet. They form cata-racts over our spiritual eyes and hinder us from keeping heavenly things in clear focus or from keeping diligent watch for the Lord’s return (see Luke 21:34).

Anxiety diverts us from what is most important. It causes our eyes to see only what is before us at that very moment. Our

worries exert great effort to keep our vision fixed on the *horizontal* (the things of the world) instead of on the *vertical* (the things of God).

In today's passage, Jesus commands us not to be anxious about our food or drink or clothing. He then immediately directs us to "look" somewhere else (Matt. 6:26). By looking at the birds of the air and the flowers of the field, we shift our focus to the heavenly Father who promises to provide even better care for us than he does for them.

Instead of allowing our minds to be distracted by the troubles of today, Jesus tells us to "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you" (Matt. 6:33). As we renew our minds and discipline our hearts to keep eternal matters as our central priority, we learn to rest in God, who has promised to meet all our needs. Therefore, even when our personal responsibilities require a certain amount of our attention, we can always look to the Lord with confidence rather than being fearful.

Reflect: What earthly cares are currently distracting you? What preoccupies your mind?

Reflect: Anxiety distracts you with temporal matters, but Jesus reminds you to keep eternal matters central.

Act: In a journal or notebook, write down everything you are currently anxious about. Then turn this "care list" into a "prayer list"—take each care to the Lord and ask him to show you which of them relate to your responsibilities, which you need to act on, and which you need to entrust (release) to him in faith.

DAY 2

Anxiety Weighs Us Down

And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches. (2 Cor. 11:28)

YESTERDAY WE SAW that anxiety can be defined as “distracting care.” Today Paul introduces us to another way of viewing it. In 2 Corinthians 11:28, the apostle describes his anxiety as *pressure*—as the burden of the physical or mental distress he feels “for all the churches” he has helped to start or shepherd. We can only imagine how many people and needs this would have entailed. And if that weren’t enough, this “daily pressure” comes *on top of* “other things” he has already mentioned—including “imprisonments” and “countless beatings,” being shipwrecked and surrounded by all kinds of dangers, and personal hardships such as sleeplessness, hunger, and thirst (see 2 Cor. 11:23–27). Pressure on top of pressure. Talk about anxiety!

Paul’s pressures were sometimes accompanied by despair (see 2 Cor. 1:8). This shouldn’t surprise us, since many people experience depression alongside anxiety. But Paul always knew where to turn—to “the God of all comfort”—and so he assures us that God “comforts us in all our affliction” (2 Cor. 1:3–4). This truth is for *all* believers throughout *all* time.

Paul wrote this comforting promise while in the furnace of personal affliction. His mental suffering was so extreme that he and his companions were “utterly burdened beyond [their] strength” and “despaired of life itself” (2 Cor. 1:8). Nevertheless, these servants of God turned the eyes of their hearts to Christ.

Perhaps you are thinking, “I’m not an apostle. How does this help me?” Let me show you two ways that it does.

First, Paul reminds us that God graciously orchestrates

suffering to strip his children of self-reliance—of the pride that feeds so many of our other sins and hinders our usefulness. In the case of the apostle and his friends, God used overwhelming pressures to accomplish their Christian growth and perseverance. “That was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead,” they said (2 Cor. 1:9). Setting our hope on God alone, not on the lessening of our pressure or on the improvement of our circumstances, is the ultimate remedy for anxiety.

Second, the example of Paul and his friends directs us to discipline ourselves to look to Jesus. Their testimony was that “on him we have set our hope” (2 Cor. 1:10). Hope delivers us from the crippling effects of anxiety, because it helps us to cling to an immovable anchor: the truth that God is for us in Jesus Christ (see Rom. 8:31). The promise of ultimate deliverance in Jesus breathed life into the suffering apostles so that they could press on in the midst of unbearable pressure. The same is true for you and me. When we have moments of panic, we can stop, take control of our thought processes, and choose to believe that God’s love for us in Christ is greater than any pressure that tries to hijack our peace.

Reflect: What might the God of providence be seeking to accomplish in your heart through your current trials?

Act: Memorize Romans 8:31. As you review this verse, meditate on God’s love for you and on the eternal security you possess in Christ.

Act: What are some of the “other things” in your life that contribute to the pressure you are feeling? Talk to the Lord about these things.

DAY 3

We Are Embodied Spirits

Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am in distress; my eye is wasted from grief; my soul and my body also. . . . My strength fails because of my iniquity, and my bones waste away. Because of all my adversaries I have become a reproach. . . . I have been forgotten like one who is dead; I have become like a broken vessel. (Ps. 31:9–12)

PSALM 31 ILLUSTRATES the interplay of our bodies and souls in our suffering and acknowledges that our frailties make us susceptible to emotional struggles like anxiety. Look at the layers of trouble that were all heaped on King David at the same time, which resulted in his having a heightened level of anxiety:

- physical weakness (“my strength fails . . . my bones waste away”)
- a conscience that was troubled by sin (“because of my iniquity”)
- hostility from his opponents (“because of all my adversaries”)
- abusive treatment from others (“I have become a reproach”)
- betrayal by his friends (“I have been forgotten like one who is dead”)

No wonder his soul and body—his whole person—were in “distress”!

The word *distress* implies mental strain or stress that is caused by danger or trouble and is impacting the body. It’s a vivid picture of the powerful effects of anxiety on a person’s inner and outer strength. It’s also a reminder of the way that challenging circumstances outside the body can aggravate anguish in the soul.

Because of his distress, David needs help and assurance from God that his whole person—both his body and soul—are in God’s caring hands. And so he prays.

“Be gracious to me, O LORD” is his simple yet bold cry. Though he is helpless, David’s desperate prayer reveals that he still has hope that God will eventually come to his aid. Clearly his faith is feeble in the moment; he finds it difficult to rest in God—to trust him as he slowly crawls through his personal fog. And yet he still calls out to God. He consciously moves from anxiety to assurance by personalizing the Bible’s truth—by choosing to hide by faith in God, who is his “rock of refuge” and “strong fortress” (Ps. 31:2). Later in the same psalm, David reiterates his dependence on the Lord—which, while unavoidable, he also makes a choice to submit to: “But I trust in you, O LORD; I say, ‘You are my God. My times are in your hand’” (vv. 14–15).

In what ways might anxiety be affecting your body or sense of strength? Are you reaching out to God for the empowering grace that you need today? Do you see yourself moving from anxiety to assurance?

Ultimately, security and peace come from the Lord—from knowing and trusting the character and love of God. So don’t let your anxiety lead you away from God. Run to him today.

Reflect: When you are anxious, do you cry out to God or fight your anxiety alone? Why?

Reflect: Durable faith reaches for joy, even in the midst of distress: “I will rejoice and be glad in your steadfast love, because you have seen my affliction” (Ps. 31:7). How can you choose the path of joy?

Act: In a notebook or journal, write out a prayer that admits your needs and asks for grace.