

Cases of Anxiety in the Bible

Paul's Burden for the Churches.

2 Corinthians 11:28 “*Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.*” Paul confesses to “daily pressure of concern for all the churches,” which indicates that he experienced emotional strain. The build up to this was his description of external pressure, which is what we tend to focus on. *2 Corinthians 11:23-27 Paul enumerates hardships: “I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked... I have laboured and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked.”*

He then adds the daily pressure and concern for churches he loves. Many parents can identify with this. They don't describe themselves as generally afraid, but they are anxious concerning their children. Paul is describing the hardships of his ministry — beatings, imprisonments, hunger, danger — and then adds this deeply personal note. The “*daily pressure*” (Greek: *epistasis*) conveys the sense of constant mental and emotional weight. It shows Paul's **empathic anxiety** — not self-centred fear, but loving concern for others' spiritual well-being. **Sometimes the daily pressure we experience is far more difficult than the acute once off occurrences of anxiety.**

Concern (*merimna* in Greek) can be a healthy form of care when rooted in love and responsibility. **Internalized stress is stress that is carried internally without outward expression.** Contemporary research shows that chronic stress affects the brain, immune system, and cardiovascular health (American Psychological Association). Internalizing stress often leads to fatigue, irritability, and spiritual weariness.

How often do we carry burdens silently, thinking we can handle everything? Anxiety becomes harmful when it turns inward — when fear replaces trust and rumination replaces prayer. Sometimes we are anxious, but we call it concern.

A major symptom of this type of anxiety is constant mental preoccupation and emotional load.

What thoughts invade your mind regardless of what you are doing?

Internal stress is persistent and ongoing, not just occasional. Paul internalized responsibility for others' spiritual wellbeing—he carried a heavy burden in his heart and mind.

Examples from Paul's life:

- *2 Corinthians 6:5 – “in beatings, imprisonments, and riots...”*
- *Acts 20:31 – “I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.”*

Note how Paul's heart and mind were constantly engaged with the wellbeing of others—internal stress was inevitable.

1. **Emotional labour** – carrying others' emotional/spiritual burdens can lead to burnout.
2. **Rumination** – excessive thinking about problems without action increases anxiety.
3. **The cost of internalizing stress** – headaches, sleep disruption, weakened immune system.

Paul openly acknowledges his internal struggle—he doesn't hide the pressure, modelling honesty about stress.

What burdens am I carrying like Paul but in silence?"

The pressure Paul faced was extreme:

2 Corinthians 1:8-10 We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about the troubles we experienced in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death. **But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead.**"

Sometimes God allows you to experience extreme stretching so that you learn how to depend on Him. Paul experienced extreme internal pressure, to the point of despair. **He reframed his circumstances (this happened that we might...) and emphasised reliance on God as the solution.** He is also an example of someone who was open about it.

2 Corinthians 7:5-6 "For when we came into Macedonia, we had no rest, but we were harassed at every turn—**conflicts on the outside, fears within.**"

Here Paul explicitly mentions internal fears, not just external pressures. Anxiety is acknowledged as a real, inward struggle. I wonder what the subpoints would be under "fears within". **You can be in God's will whilst experiencing "conflicts on the outside and fears within."**

We cope better with challenges when we understand that they are part of life.

Philippians 1:27-30 "For **it has been granted to you** on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him, since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have."

Paul's ongoing internal struggle is **normalized as part of faithful living. Suffering is not always external but often it is more to do with inner agony.**

1 Thessalonians 2:17-18 "But, brothers and sisters, when we were torn away from you, we were left with no choice but to have sorrowful hearts. We wanted to come to you—certainly I, Paul, did again and again—but Satan blocked our way."

I see what my wife goes through when there is injustice shown to our children. **Sometimes the internalised stress increases due to care and love we have for people.** Paul experiences **frustration, disappointment, and emotional burden** while separated from the churches he loves.

Galatians 4:19 "My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you..."

Paul describes **internal anguish** over spiritual growth and wellbeing of others—stress that is felt deeply and personally. People get anxious about different things. While some believers get anxious about what to wear on Sundays, Paul got anxious about the spiritual growth of his disciples. **Sometimes our frustrations are linked to our callings. When we are very passionate about something it can result in a deep pain when there is little progress.** How we process this is important. We can experience internalised stress that we don't talk about because others don't think it's a big deal.

The patterns we see and lessons we learn from Paul are:

- **Paul's stress is relational – he worries about the spiritual welfare of others.**
- **It is persistent – anxiety is daily (2 Corinthians 11:28).**
- **He experiences physical and emotional symptoms – sleeplessness, despair, toil.**
- **His response is spiritual reliance – prayer, dependence on God, perseverance.**

Sources of internalised stress

When we are able to identify the source of our internal stress it assists us in dealing with it. There are times when I've said to my wife, "my love it's not that it's a busy week but I'm feeling the weight of responsibility." That weight can result in stress that is often internalized. Those of you in business know what I'm talking about. Your business can be doing well but there's always the pressure and weight of responsibility to make sure everyone on staff gets paid. We need to be careful not to judge people based on workload. There are times when someone is experiencing genuine stress even when they're not too busy. Skilled ministers understand the various sources of stress.

1. Responsibility overload

- The load can be too much. We need to remember what Jesus said, "my yoke is easy and my burden is light". Often, we carry burdens that are out of our control. Sometimes we have to learn time and energy boundaries and set limits.
- We can be too unskilled or inexperienced for the load
- At times the load is not for us to carry on our own, we need to delegate.
- Sometimes we carry loads that are too mundane monotonous or boring. They become draining for us.
- Sometimes we don't have the physical health necessary for the size of our load
- Sometimes we carry a load that's for a different season past or future
- Sometimes we carry a load, but the driving force or motive is wrong. The result of this is that we don't have divine grace assisting us.
- There are times when the grace has lifted for carrying the load.

2. Unresolved conflict

Paul had to deal with churches that were in sin or division (2 Cor 2:5-11)

3. Fear and uncertainty

This often happens when you are in limbo due to indecisiveness on your part or others failing to make a call on something.

4. Perfectionism and high self-expectation

How do you measure success? This often comes with self-criticism

5. Emotional suppression and isolation

6. Traumatic and repetitive hardship

7. Lack of rest or recovery

This reminds me of a time when I was dealing with a particular team in an organization. They said to me, "Paul we are just longing for a month with no changes made, just one month." They said, "Paul our boss is moving at 180km/hour, we are only moving at 60km/hour." They had a pace-setting leader.

How Paul Addressed It

Philippians 4:6–9 **6** Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. **7** And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. **8** Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. **9** Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

Paul demonstrates emotional regulation — the ability to acknowledge emotion without being dominated by it.

Step	Biblical Practice	Psychological Parallel
1. Awareness	“Do not be anxious” (recognize worry)	Cognitive awareness of thought patterns
2. Expression	“Present your requests to God”	Externalize through communication or journaling
3. Gratitude	“With thanksgiving”	Reframes the emotional state positively
4. Reframing focus	“Think on what is true, noble, pure...”	Cognitive restructuring toward positive truths
5. Behavioural follow-through	“Put it into practice”	Embodied action that reinforces peace

Conclusion

Paul transformed his concern into prayerful intercession. **The difference between ruin and restoration lies not in whether we feel anxious, but in what we do with that anxiety.**

Elijah teaches us that God whispers in stillness, not just in fire. Paul models how anxiety can be sanctified into empathy and prayer.

At the heart of it all, we see a God who does not shame us for our fear but meets us in it. If you reflect on all the examples we have discussed, we see God feeding us, speaking gently, reframing our purpose, and guarding our hearts with peace that surpasses understanding.