

## An Introduction to Anxiety

How have fear and anxiety affected you and the people around you? I asked someone recently, “What do you miss about your wife?” He answered saying, she used to be more relaxed and carefree, but now she is highly strung and controlling. Our levels of anxiety affect us so much more than we think. People are workaholics today often due to deep seated anxiety. Some people run away when they are anxious whilst others get into fight mode. My prayer is that we learn how to spot anxiety. It’s often masked as something else. Accurate diagnosis results in accurate treatment. We live in a society that has become friends with fear and anxiety. Many people have embraced it as part of their personality. You hear people embracing this by saying things like, “I am a worrier!” Often when people are stressed, they want everyone else to be stressed together with them. They sometimes lash out at you if you don’t seem to have the same level of worry as they have. **We're living in a time where many people are bound by anxiety, but because of the hurry-sickness of the day we have normalized this condition.** In this series we are going to examine in-depth, from both a theological and psychological perspective, the nature of anxiety, its impact on us and its impact on those around us. In addition to this I will show you the continuum in scripture when it comes to the intensity and gravity of anxiety. This is important so that people know when they are dealing with a disorder that needs to be treated or managed. The problem is that we have tended to look at anxiety through a single lens, of either theology or psychology. In this series we are taking a deeper look at anxiety by integrating the neurobiology, neuroscience, psychology and theology of anxiety. I will also illustrate the different sources of anxiety, ranging from chemical imbalances and psychological factors to demonic spirits that come to torment with a spirit of fear. In this first message I will give a rationale for this study and also lay a foundation with regards to various Hebrew and Greek words associated with anxiety. I'm also going to contrast anxiety with fear, explaining the difference.

*"Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." — Philippians 4:6-7*

*Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. — 1 Pet 5:7*

Elsewhere we are told that perfect love drives out fear. If we have these instructions with regards to anxiety, then why is it so difficult to obey and what are the consequences of continuing to live with anxiety? This is an important question that will be answered in this message and others in the series.

### 1. Defining Anxiety

#### A. Integrated definition

**Anxiety is a whole-person state of heightened apprehension and inner unrest — marked by mental worry, emotional unease, physical tension, and often spiritual distraction — arising from real, perceived, or imagined threats, and resolved through truth, trust, and peace in God.**

#### B. Clinical / Psychological Definition

**Anxiety is a state of excessive apprehension, worry, or nervousness about a real or perceived threat, often accompanied by physical symptoms such as muscle tension, rapid heartbeat, and restlessness.**

- It can be acute (short-term response to stress) or chronic (persistent, excessive, and disruptive).

- The American Psychological Association adds that anxiety often occurs *in the absence of an immediate threat* — making it different from fear, which responds to something present and specific.

### C. Common Everyday Definition

Anxiety is feeling uneasy, tense, or on edge — as if something bad might happen — even if you can't name exactly what or when.

Can you identify with these definitions of anxiety?

### D. Biblical Understanding

In Scripture, anxiety is often connected to:

- Worry that distracts from trust in God (*merimnaō* — “to be pulled apart,” Matthew 6:25–34).
- Divided focus between God’s promises and perceived dangers (Luke 10:41, Martha “anxious about many things”).
- Sometimes linked to spiritual bondage (Romans 8:15 – “spirit of fear”).

*Romans 8:15 The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.”*

“Live in fear again” – Fear here is connected to slavery or bondage, implying a spiritual state of oppression rather than a normal caution. Life in the Spirit produces sonship and intimacy with God, not servile dread. Abba, Father speaks of security, belonging, and relational closeness — the opposite of anxiety-driven distance. Spiritual Implication – This verse frames fear as something incompatible with the Spirit-led life, especially when it becomes a controlling influence rooted in past bondage.

From a biblical worldview, anxiety is not merely a chemical or emotional state — it can be a whole-person experience involving body, mind, soul, and spirit.

Hebrew Terms:

- *pāħad* (fear, dread, terror) – the emotional fear to avoid.
- *yārē'* (fear, reverence, awe) – the healthy fear directed toward God.

## 2. A rationale for studying anxiety

*Luke 12:22-34* <sup>22</sup> Then Jesus said to his disciples: “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. <sup>23</sup> For life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. <sup>24</sup> Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds! <sup>25</sup> Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life<sup>[a]</sup>? <sup>26</sup> Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest?

<sup>27</sup> “Consider how the wild flowers grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. <sup>28</sup> If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you—you of little faith! <sup>29</sup> And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. <sup>30</sup> For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them. <sup>31</sup> But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.

<sup>32</sup> “Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. <sup>33</sup> Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. <sup>34</sup> For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Upon reading these scriptures we see a strong link between anxiety and priorities. We also see a strong link between anxiety and a deficit in our understanding of God’s love for us. For this reason, it is crucial to always include the teaching on the attributes of God such as His love and faithfulness, when we address the issue of anxiety. **We must have a strong theology of the Love of God if we are to have a theological position regarding anxiety.** Throughout this passage Jesus encourages us to consider certain things. We must consider how valuable we are in comparison to other parts of God’s creation. We must consider His love and His pleasure. We must consider our priorities by seeking His Kingdom first. Sadly, we live in a world where this is not happening much. In helping people to overcome anxiety we cannot avoid these fundamental questions of life. It is not enough to deal with one aspect of anxiety and not go to some of the core issues. This study is also important because of the consequences of anxiety today.

### **3. What are some of the consequences of anxiety in the Bible?**

According to scripture, remaining in an anxious state can have severe consequences.

#### **1. Emotional & Mental Consequences**

*Proverbs 12:25 – “Anxiety weighs down the heart, but a kind word cheers it up.”*

→ Anxiety burdens and discourages the inner person.

*Luke 10:41–42 41 “Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “you are worried and upset about many things, 42 but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.”*

- Worried – Greek *merimnaō* — to be anxious, distracted, or pulled apart in different directions.
- Upset – Greek *thorybazō* — to be emotionally agitated, disturbed, or in turmoil.
- Contrast of Focus – Martha is overwhelmed by many tasks; Mary focuses on presence with Jesus.
- Spiritual Application – Anxiety here is portrayed as a misplaced priority problem — being consumed by activity rather than intimacy with Christ.

→ Anxiety distracts and causes emotional agitation.

#### **2. Physical Consequences**

*Psalm 31:9–10 – “Be merciful to me, LORD, for I am in distress; my eyes grow weak with sorrow, my soul and body with grief. My life is consumed by anguish and my years by groaning; my strength fails because of my affliction, and my bones grow weak.”*

→ Anxiety and distress weaken the body over time.

**Psalm 38:8 – “I am feeble and utterly crushed; I groan in anguish of heart.”**

→ Intense worry can sap energy and cause physical exhaustion.

### **3. Spiritual Consequences**

**Matthew 13:22 – “The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful.”**

→ Anxiety can choke spiritual growth and fruitfulness.

**Matthew 6:27 – “Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?”**

→ Anxiety is spiritually unproductive — it changes nothing and wastes energy.

**Philippians 4:6–7 “Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation... present your requests to God. And the peace of God... will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”**

→ Ongoing anxiety blocks the experience of God’s peace.

### **4. What are some consequences of anxiety according to research?**

As I take you through these, you might be aware of the symptoms you are experiencing but had never linked them to anxiety.

#### **1. Physical Health Impacts**

- **Cardiovascular Strain:** Chronic, untreated anxiety increases the risk of heart disease and raises blood pressure, potentially mimicking heart attack symptoms during panic attacks.
- **Systemic Stress Effects:** Anxiety puts ongoing stress on the nervous, digestive, immune, and respiratory systems, compromising overall health.
- **Health Anxiety & Heart Disease:** Individuals with high health-related anxiety have been shown to face a 70% increased risk of ischemic heart disease over a 12-year period. (Ischemic = the restriction of blood supply to a part of the body, causing a shortage of oxygen and nutrients).
- **Potential Dementia Link:** Chronic anxiety may double the risk of developing dementia, though timely treatment might reverse this risk.

#### **2. Mental, Cognitive & Emotional Consequences**

- **Cognitive Disruption:** Anxiety impairs concentration and attention by biasing focus toward perceived threats, leading to intrusive thoughts and distractibility.
- **Memory Impairment:** Elevated stress hormones (like cortisol) can disrupt the hippocampus and prefrontal cortex, harming both working memory and long-term recall.
- **Sleep Disturbances:** Anxiety often disrupts sleep patterns, particularly REM sleep, which can trigger or intensify mood disorders like depression.
- **Occupational and Social Strain:** Anxiety can hinder job performance, productivity, decision-making, and attendance—while also impacting social interaction and emotional stability.

### 3. Psychiatric & Behavioural Risks

- **Increased Vulnerability:** Anxiety disorders are closely linked to higher risks of depression, substance use, and suicidal thoughts or attempts.
- **Behavioural Withdrawal:** People with social anxiety may isolate themselves, leading to poor social skills, avoidance behaviours, and elevated risk for mood disorders.
- **Chronic-Use Habits:** Financial or economic anxiety may push individuals toward unhealthy coping mechanisms—like smoking or overeating—though these strategies often worsen overall health.

### 5. What is the difference between anxiety and fear?

Aspect	Fear	Anxiety
Trigger	Immediate, specific, identifiable threat (e.g., a barking dog charging).	Future-oriented, vague, or imagined threat (e.g., “What if I lose my job?”).
Time Focus	Present.	Future.
Function	Protective — activates fight–flight–freeze.	Preparatory — alerts to possible danger, but can be excessive.
Duration	Short-lived; fades when the threat is gone.	Prolonged; may persist without a trigger.
Nature	Often rational and proportional.	Often disproportionate or irrational.
Symptoms	Immediate physical surge (adrenaline, rapid heartbeat).	Ongoing restlessness, tension, fatigue.

### 6. What are the categories of fear and anxiety in scripture?

#### 1. Natural Fear (*Healthy Caution or Reverence*)

*yārē', phobos (in awe)*

Natural fear is a God-given response to protect from danger or to stand in awe of Him.

- **Proverbs 9:10** – “*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.*” (*yārē'*)
- **Exodus 20:20** – “*...the fear of Him will keep you from sinning.*”
- **Genesis 32:7** – Jacob’s fear prompts careful preparation to meet Esau.

*Genesis 32:7 In great fear and distress Jacob divided the people who were with him into two groups, and the flocks and herds and camels as well.*

Context – Jacob is about to meet his brother Esau after many years, fearing retaliation for past wrongs (Genesis 27). “Great fear and distress” – Hebrew terms: *yārē'* (fear, dread, reverence). *ṣar* (distress, anxiety, trouble, tightness of heart). Behavioural Response – Anxiety drives Jacob to make a strategic but defensive plan (dividing his camp to minimize loss).

This is an example of natural fear (genuine danger) mixed with faith in process (he later prays in vv. 9–12) — showing that even people of faith wrestle with fear while making practical preparations.

**9** *Then Jacob prayed, “O God of my father Abraham, God of my father Isaac, LORD, you who said to me, ‘Go back to your country and your relatives, and I will make you prosper,’ **10** I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness you have shown your servant. I had only my staff when I crossed this Jordan, but now I have become two camps. **11** Save me, I pray, from the hand of my brother Esau, for I am afraid he will come and attack me, and also the mothers with their children.*

**12** *But you have said, ‘I will surely make you prosper and will make your descendants like the sand of the sea, which cannot be counted.’”*

- **Admits Fear** – Jacob openly acknowledges his anxiety: “*I am afraid...*” (Hebrew *yārē'* — to fear, dread).
- **Grounded in God’s Promise** – He anchors his request in what God had already said, showing faith alongside fear.
- **Humility Before God** – He recognizes God’s past faithfulness as part of calming his present fears.
- **Faith–Fear Tension** – A real biblical picture of feeling anxious while still choosing to trust God’s word.

**Joshua 2:9–11** – Rahab’s fear of God’s power leads to faith.

**9** *and said to them, “I know that the LORD has given you this land and that a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you. **10** We have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan, whom you completely destroyed. **11** When we heard of it, our hearts melted in fear and everyone’s courage failed because of you, for the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below.”*

- **“Great fear”** – Hebrew *pāḥad* — dread, terror in anticipation of danger.
- **“Melting in fear”** – Hebrew *māsas* — to dissolve, lose heart, or be demoralized.
- **Cause of Fear** – Not just Israel’s military reputation, but the recognition of God’s supernatural power and judgment.
- **Spiritual Twist** – This fear led Rahab to faith and action (protecting the spies), showing fear can sometimes open the door to **reverence and surrender** when it’s based on God’s reality.

**There is a healthy type of fear that causes you to be careful or motivates you to take precaution.** For example, someone who has been promiscuous often lacks a healthy anxiety with regards to STDs and unwanted pregnancies. Someone might begin to study hard at school because of a healthy anxiety around failing again and being held back a year. “Sorry guys I need to start studying, I have exams starting in two weeks.”

## 2. Fleshly Fear (*Human Worry or Unbelief*)

merimnaō, phobos (panic), pāḥad

Fleshly fear is an emotional reaction to perceived threat or uncertainty, rooted in self-reliance rather than trust in God.

- **Matthew 6:25–34** – Jesus warns against anxious worry (*merimnaō*) about provision.
- **Matthew 14:30–31** – Peter sinks when he fears the wind and waves (*phobos*).
- **Proverbs 29:25** – “*The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is safe.*”
- **Numbers 13:31–33** – Israel fears the giants and refuses God’s promise.

31 *But the men who had gone up with him said, “We can’t attack those people; they are stronger than we are.” 32 And they spread among the Israelites a bad report about the land they had explored. They said, “The land we explored devours those living in it. All the people we saw there are of great size. 33 We saw the Nephilim there (the descendants of Anak come from the Nephilim). We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them.”*

Fear-Driven Perspective – The spies magnified the threat and minimized God’s power. **This is what fear does. It causes you to suppress what you know of God’s majesty and might and gets you to magnify the threat.**

Emotional Exaggeration – “We seemed like grasshoppers” reveals distorted self-perception caused by fear.

Consequences – This fear (Hebrew pāḥad / dread) spread to the whole community, leading to rebellion and 40 years of wilderness wandering.

*Numbers 14:1–4, 34 1 That night all the members of the community raised their voices and wept aloud. 2 All the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron, and the whole assembly said to them, “If only we had died in Egypt! Or in this wilderness! 3 Why is the LORD bringing us to this land only to let us fall by the sword? Our wives and children will be taken as plunder. Wouldn’t it be better for us to go back to Egypt?” 4 And they said to each other, “We should choose a leader and go back to Egypt.”....34 For forty years—one year for each of the forty days you explored the land—you will suffer for your sins and know what it is like to have me against you.*

This is an example of fleshly fear that directly blocks faith and obedience. **It shows how anxiety can distort reality and spread to others.**

## 3. Demonic Fear (*Spiritual Bondage or Attack*)

deilia, phobos (bondage), kolasis (torment)

Demonic fear described in Scripture as a spirit, torment, or bondage, often paralyzing obedience to God.

- 2 Timothy 1:7 – “*God has not given us a spirit of fear (deilia), but of power, love, and a sound mind.*”
- Romans 8:15 – “*You did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear...*”
- Hebrews 2:14–15 – *Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—15 and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.*

The devil holds people in bondage through fear of death. Theological Link to Anxiety – This shows that some fears (especially ultimate fears like death) can be spiritually rooted and oppressive, not merely psychological.

- *1 John 4:18 – 1 John 4:18 There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.*

Fear involves torment (*kolasis*), driven out by God's love.

- *Job 4:14–15 – Job 4:14–15 Fear and trembling seized me and made all my bones shake. 15 A spirit glided past my face, and the hair on my body stood on end.*

Eliphaz is recounting a supernatural, night-time experience that deeply unsettled him. "Fear and trembling" (*pāħad* and *ra'ad* in Hebrew) describe intense emotional and bodily responses. The presence of "a spirit" suggests a direct encounter with the supernatural realm, which caused an involuntary fear response. Fear and trembling caused by the presence of a spirit.

*Isaiah 8:12–13 – 12 "Do not call conspiracy everything this people calls a conspiracy; do not fear what they fear, and do not dread it. 13 The Lord Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy, he is the one you are to fear, he is the one you are to dread."*

Misplaced Fear – *pāħad* (fear, dread, terror) – the emotional fear to avoid. The people of Judah were adopting the same fears as the surrounding culture, driven by rumour, conspiracy, and human threats. Warning not to take on the fear gripping the unbelieving nations.

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