

FEAR AND ANXIETY: STEPS TO RESTORING COURAGE AND STABILITY

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Horseback riding is an activity my husband Tom, and I enjoy. Some years ago a relaxed summer ride suddenly changed. Tom's horse mistook a large branch in front of him as a threat. Fast and furious the horse took off, and Tom hung on. This horse (and probably my husband) demonstrated one definition of fear: an immediate response to a real or perceived danger. Sometimes described as "fight or flight," fear is a God-given reaction to danger; it activates us for survival. Anxiety however, is more about the feeling that lingers on after the immediate threat has passed. When TIME/CNN took a poll regarding September 11, 2001, eight months after the event the initial fear and shock lifted for people, but there was a kind of a mass generalized anxiety rumbling beneath the surface. With enough present-day stress, this kind of underlying anxiety can be sparked into flames of fear again.

COMMON CAUSES: The following four components can trigger anxiety and fear:

1. **Biological:** In a fear response, the part of the brain called the amygdala tells the body what to do (i.e. fight or flight). Once the danger has passed, the prefrontal cortex tells the amygdala to "stand down." However, if the amygdala overrides this command and stays "on alert" and if other chemicals, such as adrenaline and cortisol are also operating at an increased level, anxiety can result.
2. **Family:** Upbringing and experiences have a role to play in an anxiety disorder. Families that value perfectionism, performance and excessive criticism can be more anxiety-prone. Significant personal loss (death, divorce, abandonment) can also contribute to anxiety.
3. **Chronic Stress:** Constant bombardment of media, technology, work or school pressures inhibits families and individuals from communicating and having "down time." This can set children and adults up for symptoms of anxiety.

MOVING TOWARD COURAGE AND STABILITY TREATMENT:

Renewing our head, our heart and our habits, and sometimes medication (Kenneth Nichols, "Christian Counseling Today") can greatly help in relieving anxiety and fear:

1. **Our Head:** “Casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.” (2 Corinthians 10:5) Christ-centered Cognitive-Behavior Therapy that replaces the anxious thought patterns with the Word of God (Philippians 4:8) is an excellent tool to help restore stability.
2. **Our Heart:** Learning how to rest in Christ’s perfect love which casts out fear (1 John 4:18) can encourage our hearts. Prayer, and familiarity with Christ’s own battles with fear and anxiety, such as in the Garden of Gethsemane, can bring us His divine power to help restore courage.
3. **Our Habits:** Taking one day at a time (Matthew 6:34) and accepting things that we cannot change are starting points for courage and stability. A balance of daily structure and rest, exercise, journaling, contact with nature, and time with trusted friends bring renewal to troubled minds and bodies.
4. **Medication:** Some medications have proven to be helpful in restoring chemical imbalances in the brain that influence anxiety. See your physician or psychiatrist for assessment and recommendations.

Psalm 139 assures us that God’s presence is with us always. Beth Moore explains in *Breaking Free* that we cannot escape God’s presence, but we do not always *sense* His presence. His Word promises that He will never leave us or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5) even during anxious, fearful or worried seasons of our lives.

REFERENCES

Christian Counseling Today, Vol. 16 #3: “Overcoming the Overwhelming” by Kenneth W. Nichols

TIME.com, Saturday, Jun.01, 2002: “The Science of Anxiety” by Christine Gorman

Breaking Free by Beth Moore

Mary Lambrecht is also available to give a more complete seminar on this topic. You may contact her at the Center for Family Healing (920/720-8872 X304).

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