

## anxiety-FREE zone!

by Florence MacKenzie

**One of my friends recently asked me what topics I had planned for upcoming “Managing Your Emotions” columns.** When I mentioned I was considering writing about anxiety, I could tell right away this had struck a chord with her as she quietly responded, “Oh, I need to read that.”

Many people in our churches and communities regularly experience feelings of anxiety, yet this is not a new phenomenon. For example, the apostle Peter wrote about casting all our anxiety on God (1 Pet. 5:7) and the apostle Paul urged his readers not to be anxious about anything (Phil. 4:6). This doesn't mean we should be unconcerned about issues that affect us, but we need to put a brake on those relentless, apprehensive thoughts that dominate us and steal our peace. The problem for those of us who are susceptible to anxiety is that we're often not sure how to do this but various options are open to us. Appropriate exercise, a healthy diet, and relaxation techniques can all help in managing our anxiety levels and, in some cases, medication may be necessary. Following through on biblical instructions is also a valuable course of action to take and an excellent place to start is Philippians 4:6-7.

Here, Paul directs us to present our requests to God. I've often heard people ask why we should tell God our needs, given that He knows everything about us anyway. I think one possibility is that we show our dependence on Him when we admit our need to Him. It removes our self-sufficiency and turns our attention to the One who is most capable of meeting any needs we have. Telling God what we need also means we have to verbalize our requests. This helps us to focus on what these are and to be specific about them. When we get into the habit of presenting our requests to God with sincere and thankful hearts, we are promised supernatural peace that guards both our hearts and our minds (Phil. 4:7).

This reminds me of my friend, Joe, who as a teenager, often tried to sneak in to parties where he hadn't been invited. When he couldn't get past the doorkeeper at the front of the building, he would go to a rear entrance to see if he could get in to the party that way. But, despite his persistent efforts, he'd usually find that the rear entrance was also protected by a doorkeeper. End result? No way in to the party!



This is what it's like when God's peace guards our hearts and minds. It's as if there are two doorkeepers on duty – one guarding entry to our hearts and the other guarding the way into our minds. When anxiety tries to gain access, there's just no way in. God appreciates how important it is to have both our emotions and our thinking protected, so his peace guards all the entry points to our hearts and minds.

If you are wondering what practical steps you might take in response to anxiety, perhaps you will find these suggestions helpful:

- Make a deliberate choice to act on the biblical instruction to not be anxious by asking God to help you follow through on this. If you're like me, you'll probably have to do this several times a day, but that's okay.
- Familiarize yourself with Bible verses about worry and anxiety. Write them on cards, enter them into your phone, file them on your computer, and place them anywhere you're likely to see them. Think about these verses frequently, allowing their truth to sink deep into your heart and mind.
- Remind yourself of God's character. For example, He is the God of peace; He is sovereign and in complete control; He loves you and wants the best for you; and His way is perfect so He never makes mistakes.
- Give yourself permission to laugh. Don't wait until you feel less anxious, but find something every day that makes you laugh.

When anxious thoughts come upon you during the night, make a mental note to deal with them the next day. Or, imagine putting your anxieties into a huge garbage sack and then mentally placing this sack outside the bedroom door. With your “anxiety sack” safely out of reach, sleep might come more readily.

God promises that we will experience His peace as we live in Christ Jesus. Let's remain in a vibrant relationship with Him, intentionally casting all our anxiety on Him and trusting Him for the outcome. Thankfully, He's big enough to handle it!