

COPING WITH ANXIETY

Anxiety has always been a formidable emotional problem for many people, young and old alike, to overcome. Certainly, it seems that there is more reason than ever nowadays to feel anxious or to worry about what the future may hold. All one needs to do is flip to a news channel on the television, click on the news headlines on the internet, or turn on the radio to be overwhelmed by all of the bad news of the day. The current global financial crisis is cause for concern indeed. Many families are facing foreclosures on their homes which in itself would cause anyone to feel anxious and to feel a genuine sense of loss and uncertainty. And we all know that uncertainty can cause one to be overcome with fear, worry, and doubt. When parents are experiencing severe anxiety over the financial security of their family, the children also pick up on these feelings and become fearful as well. As if coping with childhood or adolescent problems isn't enough, children and adolescents can also experience anxiety over the uncertainty that a family financial crisis may bring. And if adults have a difficult time coping with these anxiety provoking issues, how much more difficult is it for children and adolescents to cope with them.

So the question then is where do we find hope? Where do we turn when it looks like there is no hope? Who can help? Who has an answer? Who can take control? As humans, we all like to feel like we are in control. The feeling of being in control brings a certain sense of security, safety, and comfort. Likewise, when we feel like we have no control, we may become consumed by anxiety due to fear and uncertainty. But the reality is that there are very few things in this world that we can control. Bad things can and do happen and there is nothing we can do about it. So where do we turn? Where do we find security?

The truth is that there is but one place to find genuine security and that is through a vibrant and intimate relationship with God. God says in Philippians 4:4-6 to "Rejoice in the Lord always... Do not be anxious about anything." Certainly when God gave us this command he knew that we would struggle with anxiety when we face uncertainty about our future, or our safety, or our financial security. There are many legitimate reasons to be fearful, worried, or anxious and God is certainly acquainted with the minutest detail of our lives. No, God didn't mean that we should be blind to the problems that we face and plow ahead naively, completely oblivious to our surroundings. But what God did say was that He would be there for us and walk with us through our suffering. He said that we can find rest and comfort in the person and knowledge of God. This is much like the comfort of a loved one when we have experienced loss and they come and comfort us. It doesn't make the suffering go away, but it can certainly help us feel better knowing that someone is there for us who cares. Well, no one cares for us quite the way God does. After all, He created us and He created us for the expressed purpose to "know" him.

What does it mean to "know" God? It means to know the character of God. To know what God cares about. It means to know what breaks God's heart, what gets him angry or sad, or what makes him pleased. It means to know that God is in control and that God is trustworthy. Much like a wife "knows" her husband. She knows that she can count on him. She knows what he likes, what he dislikes, what he cares about. It's an

intimate “knowing.” There is great comfort in knowing that God is there, that He cares for us, and that He is in control. There is also great comfort in knowing that God identifies with your suffering and that He has great compassion for those that are suffering. J. I. Packer writes in *Knowing God*:

What were we made for? To know God.

What aim should we set for ourselves in life? To know God.

What is the “eternal life” that Jesus gives? Knowledge of God.

“This is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent” (John 17:3).

The truth is that the whole purpose of life is to know God. “This is what the Lord says: ‘Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me.’ (Jeremiah 9: 23-24).

Knowing that God is in control and knowing that He is quite capable of handling all of the troubles in the world today is our hope. Knowing that He will care for us in our difficulties relieves our anxiety and gives us the ability to be joyful in our knowledge of Him. Knowing God helps us to put our troubles into perspective and focus our attention on the most important thing in life, and that is developing a vibrant, intimate relationship with the one who created us for just that purpose. It is the answer to all of our anxiety.