

FLIPPING ANXIETY ON ITS HEAD
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God knew we would struggle. It is no coincidence that the Bible tells us 365 times, “do not fear.” Fear is a common problem and it comes in all shapes and sizes. If yours looks like anxiety, you need to know you are not alone. Many others, just like you, have suffered from anxiety. There is hope . . . but we must fight. One way to do this is to remember to “F.L.I.P.”¹

1. “F” stands for “Filling.”

Make no mistake, anxiety is a battle. And you do not want to go into battle alone. Our strength comes from Christ.

Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. John 15:4-7 (NIV)

Abiding provides divine protection. Just read Psalm 91. And James 4:8. You also don’t want to go into battle unarmed.

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people. Ephesians 6:10-18 (NIV)

What does this means practically speaking? It means that you make *abiding* a regular practice, whether you feel like it or not. Because often times, with anxiety, you won’t feel like it. Read the Bible, pray, meditate on his Word. Fill yourself with the Lord so that you are prepared for the battle.

2. “L” stands for “Lay it Down.”

We must lay down our fear. Maybe there is a specific thing of which you are afraid, or maybe you don’t even know *why* you feel anxiety, you just do. Either way you

¹ This is not a substitute for medical/psychological care. If you suffer from anxiety, please see a medical professional regarding your condition.

must lay that fear (specific or generalized) at his feet. AND YOU MUST LEAVE IT THERE. That is the hard part. It's not the putting down that gives us trouble; it's the picking back up. Why is that so hard? Because we are willing to give God the problem, BUT NOT THE OUTCOME.

In most cases, we are afraid of some eventual outcome – whether it's specific, like a lost job, or general, like "I'm going to have another panic attack if I go out." We say, "Lord, I give you this problem," but in reality we still want to control the outcome. True freedom comes when we reach the place where we can say, "Lord, I give you the outcome. Whatever you allow, I trust you to get me through it."

That isn't easy. It's downright hard. And it doesn't mean you have to like the outcome. But when we really get to where we trust that, come what may, God is worthy of our trust and that He has a plan, the chains of anxiety begin to loosen.

What does this mean practically speaking?

Abiding in the Lord grows trust and helps us lay our problems down. So, again, abide. But also, walk through the what-ifs – if this thing that I'm scared of happens, then what? Ask yourself what God's truth is about that outcome and where He will be in it. Pray, asking for help to give God the outcome, not just the problem. Philippians 4:6; Jeremiah 29:11; Romans 8:28; 1Thessalonians 5:16-18; James 5:13

3. "I" stands for "Keeping your 'eye' on eternity"

Okay, so that abbreviation is a stretch. But what does it mean? Have you ever considered that most of the time, the fears causing our anxiety do not revolve around our eternity? (If yours does, then please, please, see someone at a Bible-believing church to talk through this.) Most of the time, our fears stem from what is happening to us here on Earth. Even though this place and all its troubles are "light and momentary," we allow it to consume us, and to dictate our state of mind. 2Corinthians 4:6-18; Luke 12:29-34

The problem, then, is a matter of perspective. When our perspective is one focused on this life, our anxiety rises and falls on our circumstances here. But when we are focused on eternity – when we have an eternal perspective, if you will – our present circumstances lose their bite. I'm not saying it's always pain-free, but I am saying our ability to overcome grows exponentially. We should not discount the value of this present life – God's got us here for a reason. But when we are too focused on the here and now, we can forget that it isn't all there is, and that opens the door to anxiety.

What does this mean practically speaking?

If you are a believer, Heaven is what waits for you after this life, Are you looking forward to it, or is the notion of Heaven unnerving? If it's unnerving, ask yourself why? One of the best books I've ever read is "Heaven" by Randy Alcorn. It changed my entire perspective on Heaven and was instrumental in helping me overcome anxiety. I highly recommend it.

You can also grow an eternal perspective by getting outside yourself and doing for others who are struggling in some way. In a nutshell – SERVE. I know what you’re saying. I can’t. I have anxiety. It’s all I can do to get through the day. But again, this is when we have to act, regardless of how we feel. Serve even though you don’t feel you can. It will bless you more than those you are blessing and gives purpose and meaning even to days filled with anxiety.

4. “P” stands for “PUSH”

First, PUSH = Pray Until Something Happens. You’ve probably heard this before, but it has special application in the context of anxiety. Prayer is our link to God’s peace while we wait for His answer. There is a lot of waiting in anxiety. Waiting to get better. Waiting for the symptoms to lessen. But waiting is hard. Especially because, though we hope for complete healing, the truth is, God doesn’t promise to end our storm. What He does promise is peace during the wait. Deuteronomy 7:9; Ephesians 6:12; Philippians 4:6; Psalm 27:145. Learning to be content in the situation God has you, finding the purpose in your pain, is the key to being fully free. Philippians 4:11-13.

Second, PUSH = “Pushing Though.” With anxiety, on some days even the smallest tasks feel like pushing a huge boulder up a towering hill. It is about all you can do to just exist. I’ve been there. I know. So I say this with the utmost compassion: Get up and go. Do. Push through the pain. You will never reach the other side of the pain if you don’t walk to it. Even when you don’t feel like it – PUSH.

What does this mean practically speaking? Do the next task, complete the next chore, and drive the next carpool. Because there is no standing still with anxiety. You are either moving backwards or forwards. CHOOSE TO MOVE FORWARD, despite the pain.

CONCLUSION

When you suffer from anxiety, FIGHT BACK.

- 1) Pray, pour yourself out. Abide.
- 2) Read God’s Word. The Psalms and stories of others who persevered will help.
- 3) Sit with God.
- 4) Leave the problem AND the outcome with God.
- 5) Keep your eyes on eternity. Maintain an eternal perspective.
- 6) Keep. Pushing. Through.

Other practical tips:

- 1) Take a break from the news.
- 2) Listen to calming music. Classical (light) or easy instrumental. Christian is good if it is of a calm style.
- 3) Go through tension relieving exercises before attempting to sleep.
- 4) Exercise!
- 5) If overwhelmed, just take it one thing at a time.
- 6) Forgive yourself.
- 7) Do not cut yourself off from the world. Try to see a friend at least once a week. Keep your schedule, no matter how you “feel” about it.

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