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All words spoken by Jesus Christ are in **red text**.

A significant number of persons are experiencing varying degrees of both fear and anxiety, because our world has dramatically changed in a very short period of time. That which we knew, that which we understood, that which provided us with reference points and direction in our lives are no longer the same. Meanwhile, many now face a realistic fear that is driven by mental images of possibly dying by an invisible killer. Layered on top of our fear, are anxious thoughts as we attempt to look into a future that's filled with numerous possible outcomes—some hoped for, some undesirable and some horrific. As a consequence, many of us are suffering from out-of-control emotions as we experience a rise in blood pressure, increased stress, tension, and an uneasy feeling deep in the pit of our stomach as we do our best to navigate this uncharted territory.

## Fear vs. Anxiety

For those of us who are having difficulty managing our emotions, it is important to understand the difference between fear and anxiety, between an actual threat and a perceived threat.

Fear is one of our most basic emotions and is part of our autonomous nervous system. The autonomous nervous system controls our body functions that are not consciously (or mentally) directed, such as breathing, heartbeat, and digestive process. Fear is a protective and survivalistic response (to fight or run) when we face a real threat of danger, pain or harm. For example, our present global response is to “run” from the virus via social isolation, social distancing, wearing masks and continually washing our hands. Hopefully in the future we will “fight” the virus by an effective treatment and/or vaccine.

To understand the role, importance and benefits of fear, consider what would happen if we were not designed with the capacity of fear—including its associated survivalistic motivations. Would our response to the virus be different? Would we be less willing to change our behavior? Would things get much worse? The answer to all three questions is yes...and as such, fear is a good thing.

While fear is based upon a real and existing threat, anxiety is based upon imagined threats. Anxiety is caused by our imagination as we consider and worry about “this could occur, and that could occur.” While it is possible for these imagined events to occur—at this time they do not exist and presently exist “between our ears.” Unfortunately, our anxious thoughts will layer on top of our fear and create internal havoc. Additionally, some of us will consider the same anxious thoughts over and over—which compounds the issue—and can cause us to experience a multitude of unnecessary symptoms as we degrade to a debilitating state—which is not a good thing. Anxiety-driven symptoms include:

Feeling nervous  
Rapid heart rate  
Digestive issues  
Feeling helpless

Restlessness  
Sleep problems  
Obsessive thoughts  
Feeling in danger

Panic attacks  
Nausea  
Headaches  
Anticipating the worst outcomes

Personally...I was initially consumed by anxious thoughts as the pandemic began to spread. My thoughts included...What would happen if we go into a depression? What would happen if our children lost their jobs? What would happen if they are unable to find a cure? What would happen if...????? Every one of these thoughts are possible, but not real at this time. As such, they simply magnified my existing internal pressure and made things worse. Plus, I was experiencing the majority of symptoms listed above...which were “tearing me up on the inside.” In truth, my response to the pandemic was not in line with my faith, and not in line with God’s word.

Jesus did not say do not fear. He said do not worry and do not be anxious.

Jesus said “Therefore I say to you, **do not worry** about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? **Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?** So **why do you worry** about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? **Therefore, do not worry**, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore, **do not worry** about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.” Matthew 6:25-34

“**Be anxious for nothing**, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4:6-7

### How to Manage Anxious Thoughts

Our first (and most effective) means to manage anxiety is to begin with prayer from the depths of our heart—when we tell God everything we are experiencing. Tell Him about our fears, our anxieties, our emotions and our circumstances—and ask the Holy Spirit to intervene and guide us through this pandemic. Thereafter, we need to step forward in faith and put our complete trust in Him.

Something I did to help me was to identify and separate my fearful thoughts from my anxious thoughts. To accomplish this task, I suggest obtaining two sheets of paper and title one “Fear,” the other “Anxiety.” For the next 48 hours, every time you have a thought regarding the pandemic...prayerfully ask the Holy Spirit to reveal the answer to the following questions:

1. Is this an actual fear (a real threat)? If yes, write the thought on the Fear page.
2. Is this an anxiety (an imagined threat that could possibly occur in the future, but presently does not exist)? If yes, write this thought on the Anxiety page.

Once completed, start with the thoughts listed on the Fear page. Prayerfully ask...Am I doing everything possible to minimize my risk? If not, then what can I improve? If yes, then realize you are doing the best you can. As you move forward, fear will reinforce the need to continue the protective behavior (and not let your “guard” down).

Now look at the Anxiety page and write a date on it that is one week (7 days) in the future (plus put this date into your calendar as a reminder). Then instruct yourself that you will not allow yourself to consider these anxious thoughts until this future date because:

1. They are imagined threats that do not presently exist.
2. Thinking about these scenarios are causing me unnecessary stress and grief.
3. If these scenarios do occur, the Holy Spirit will guide me in how to deal with them in the future.
4. Meanwhile, it is prudent to focus upon those things that are more important...one day at a time.

Once documented and delayed for future review, your anxious thoughts will no longer have as much influence—because you made a commitment to think about these “things” at a later date—thereby, freeing up your mental capacity from the overburdening and cyclic regurgitation of anxiety-based “what if scenarios.” When the defined date occurs, review your list, update it if necessary, then ask yourself if any of these scenarios have occurred or not—and if so, respond accordingly. Otherwise, pick another date to review that’s 7 days away, and so forth.

Here is another consideration. Our anxieties are often reinforced every time we watch or read the news—which is like throwing gasoline onto a smoldering fire. Be assured, no one in the news media has an answer. All they can do is describe what's going on, depict the consequences and voice an opinion. Plus, news regarding the pandemic will likely stay the same until a proven treatment and/or vaccine is available. Meanwhile, it is beneficial to limit the amount of news we consume because it only makes our anxiety worse.

From a spiritual perspective, this is a time when we need to hold onto our faith in God's word and His promises with all of our heart, and with all of our soul, and with all of our mind. Jesus warned us about times such as this—for we are in the midst of a storm that is pounding upon the very foundation of every Christian's faith.

Jesus said **“Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall.”** Matthew 7:24-27



Consider what happened to Peter when he turned his eyes away from Jesus, and began to consider what was going on around him.

**“Immediately Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side, while He sent the multitudes away. And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray. Now when evening came, He was alone there. But the boat was now in the middle of the sea, tossed by the waves, for the wind was contrary. Now in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went to them, walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, “It is a ghost!” And they cried out for fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, ‘Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid.’ And Peter answered Him and said, ‘Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water.’ So He said, ‘Come.’ And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus. But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, ‘Lord, save me!’ And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him, and said to him, ‘O you of little faith, why did you doubt?’ And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. Then those who were in the boat came and worshiped Him, saying, ‘Truly You are the Son of God.’”** Matthew 14:22-33

Now is the time to let go, focus our eyes upon Jesus, completely trust in God and seek guidance from the Holy Spirit.

**“He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, ‘He is my refuge and my fortress; My God, in Him I will trust.’ Surely He shall deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the perilous pestilence. He shall cover you with His feathers, and under His wings you shall take refuge; His truth shall be your shield and buckler. You shall not be afraid of the terror by night, nor of the arrow that flies by day, nor of the pestilence that walks in darkness, nor of the destruction that lays waste at noonday.”** Psalm 91:1-6

All for His Glory,  
Harold D. Thomas