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HANDLING EXPERIENCES THAT CAUSE ANXIETY

Mayan Revelation Number 259

Normal Anxiety

Abnormal Anxiety

Constitutional Anxiety

The Treatment of Anxiety

Affirmation

Beloved Perfectionist:

This generation has been called "the generation of anxious people." We are aware of the aptness of this description when we recall the frightening increase in the use of nerve tonics, sedatives and tranquilizers. We know that psychiatrists and social workers who deal with personal problems are continually pressed beyond their strength to serve victims of excessive anxiety.

The causes of the rapid increase in the number of anxious people are numerous. Newspapers in every section of the country maintain a daily pressure of news that encourages fear and discouragement concerning the state of the world. Television frequently depicts the horrors of war, subtly suggesting the threat of atomic destruction. Business becomes intensively competitive. Executives of business corporations are moved frequently and without warning, causing insecurity in their families. Youth is fed daily doses of fear and mistrust until it understandably asks whether anything in its society is fixed and dependable.

For those steeped in the Mayan philosophy, the contrast between the Mayan civilization and the civilization of our twentieth century America is devastating. The writings, the art, and the architecture of the Mayans reflect calm and peace. It is probable that many Mayans knew what it meant to be anxious, but the record does not suggest it. They learned the secret of quiet and confident living.

Our anxieties have undergone a radical change in the past several decades. Science has effectively banished many of the obsessive fears that prevailed only a few years ago. The fear of going hungry, the gnawing of social insecurity, and the dread of many diseases have largely been banished from our society. Nevertheless, the evidence is clear that there is more anxiety in human minds than ever before. Most of us are troubled by numerous sources of tension in modern life, as they affect our individual lives and also the world in which we live.

In this Lesson we will study the nature and cure of anxiety. As is usual in such studies we will need to examine some of the abnormal forms of anxiety in order to understand better the nature of the problem which presses upon us. We will need to look closely at the treatment involved with certain individuals who face pathological anxiety in order to learn how best to handle the anxious moments in our own lives.

Begin this study by admitting that you are in some measure a victim of anxiety. Don't endeavor to put yourself in a select group which has no concerns deep enough to cause this strain on your mental powers. All of us are victims of pressing anxiety at some point. Don't seek to avoid the situation. The answer you need may be included within these pages.

With this in mind, repeat the following prayer and proceed with your Lesson which we have called HANDLING EXPERIENCES THAT CAUSE ANXIETY.

PRAYER

Dear Father, grant us insight to understand ourselves, and courage to face our weaknesses. Give us peace in the midst of the troubled world in which we live, and calm in the center of life's storms. Grant us strength by which we may live triumphantly, trusting continually in Thy grace. In Jesus' name. Amen.



NORMAL ANXIETY

NORMAL anxiety is an outgrowth of the actual conditions in which we are forced to live. All of us have moments of pressing worry. We never totally escape it. When we try to understand what is involved we conclude that anxiety stems from experiences that threaten the established pattern of our lives or of the lives of those we love. It is when we realize that we are unable to cope with a situation, and we feel our helplessness, that we become anxious.

Then we are like a man who is lost in the woods. As long as he remains confident that he can find his way out, he remains calm. When he decides that he is helpless, panic develops.

Anxiety, then, is that mental state which develops when we are confronted by some evil or disaster that we feel we can neither avoid, nor surmount.

Let us examine several of the areas of life out of which normal anxiety frequently develops.

Troubled family relationships are perhaps the most frequent source of this type of inner tension. As children grow toward adulthood, and more of their lives pass beyond the control of father and mother, a feeling of helplessness develops when a son or daughter fails in school, makes a poor social adjustment, hesitates

to choose a life work, or forms an undesirable marriage relationship. The fact that the parent himself cannot do anything to correct the situation, that it is something the son or daughter must handle alone, tends to create feelings of anxiety. These feelings are deepened when the child obviously does not want to face the situation, or when his attempts are marked by failure.

Two illustrations may help you to understand how anxiety of this kind develops. Parents asked me for aid in guiding their daughter. She is twenty-two years old. She started college in a liberal arts school, but left the campus or was dropped at the end of the first semester. She enrolled in secretarial school, but decided after several months that she was not suited to this type of study. She started and left several positions as sales clerk in department stores. Now she is doing nothing constructive. Her parents give her a liberal allowance, yet she took a considerable sum of money from her mother's pocketbook. The parents are concerned. They feel helpless. They cannot sleep. They talk continually about their daughter's problem. They have developed anxiety of a dangerous sort.

Or consider the plight of a couple who for more than ten years had hoped for the birth of a child. When at last a son was born it appeared that their greatest desires had been fulfilled. For months they poured all their love upon the child. When certain signs appeared which suggested that the development of the baby was not occurring as expected, they took him to a physician. After a careful examination the doctor informed them that the boy is subnormal mentally, and must be housed in an institution. The parents feel helpless. They have become victims of anxiety. It is to their credit that the blow did not result in a complete mental break.

In both of these cases the source of the anxiety lay in a developing situation in which parents felt powerless to control or remedy the problem. We shall deal later in this Lesson with the helps which are available to lessen or destroy the menacing power of these mental strains.

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The anxieties of many people in these competitive days arise out of business problems. Insomnia is a common hint of impending anxiety when this type of problem confronts us. I know a man who for many years had operated a community grocery store. He had made a comfortable living. When the chain stores entered the town the volume of his sales dropped drastically. He raised the prices of his goods to maintain his income, and the number of customers dropped even lower. All that he owned was invested in the business. He mistakenly concluded that he was helpless. He became anxious. He could not banish the dark specter of fear from his mind.

A business executive, a secretary, or anyone who is associated with business is wise if he closes the door of his office or business at night, and with that act, closes his mind to the problems which are there. At night, when weary, problems become distorted. We tend not to see clearly. We assume hopelessness when confidence is not out of place. Whatever anxieties stem from your business or financial problems, put them aside in the evening. Enjoy the pleasure of fellowship with family and friends. You may have grounds for hope when you examine your problem in the light of a new day, and with a relaxed and rested mind.

Monotony is often a source of anxiety feelings. When we have little to do, few obligations that demand our attention, or a feeling of emptiness about life, we tend to be easy victims of anxiety. Some years ago a bus driver in New Jersey disappeared, bus and all, and was located nine days later in Florida. He was arrested and prosecuted. After hearing his story, the judge acquitted him, much to the delight of the people of the community in which he lived, who had hysterically supported him with petitions and pleas. The fact was that many of his neighbors experienced the same feelings of monotony which had led to his desperate adventure. A sense of boredom and meaninglessness in life is a frequent source of anxiety. We are wise if we recognize the symptoms, and adopt positive measures to banish the destructive force of helplessness which stalks us every day.

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Guilt is another source of anxiety in the human mind. We are moral beings. When we commit those acts that are out of keeping with our heritage we tend to feel guilty. Unless we possess a faith that makes forgiveness available to the one who is penitent, guilt can result in a surrender to helplessness which, in turn, creates anxiety.

You have a moral and spiritual side to your nature. The anxiety that presses at times upon you is not due merely to the difficult conditions that you face, but to the fact that you are so made that you are never content with anything less than the best. The fact that you can stand away from a situation, look at it clearly, and weigh the values involved, marks you as different than the animals. Through your imagination you can anticipate the worst that can happen. You can picture the situation as it might, or ought to be. You are subject to discords and conflicts within your mind. All of this makes you a potential victim of anxiety. It is essential that you discover the resources through which your best self can triumph. An anxious mind is the penalty for any neglect.



CONSTITUTIONAL ANXIETY

SOMETIMES anxiety has its basis in the make-up of our physical and mental constitution. Nothing appears more obvious than that some children, by their very natures, react anxiously to life from the very beginning.

There is wide divergence of opinion as to whether this tendency toward over-anxiety has its source in heredity, or in the early environment of a child. Eminent authorities are listed on both sides of the issue. The source is not as important as the evident fact that some individuals have to battle against anxiety as a residue of their constitutional make-up.

In many people we can trace this handicap back to the earliest childhood experiences. Some physicians declare that they can predict by the way an infant feeds as to whether he or she will be a chronic worrier. Many children are afraid of the dark. Their anxiety is expressed in a hundred ways every day. When old enough to go to school they run all the way for fear of being late. Though possessing good minds they are anxious about every examination. Parents assure them that it does not matter whether they pass or fail, but attempts to put them at

ease do not relieve the tension.

This pattern is carried through life. Every new or testing situation becomes a reason for anxiety. A woman who came to me for a conference concerning her problems told me that she had been ill for an hour before she left her home for the appointment. When I inquired further about her condition I learned that this had often happened when she was facing a new responsibility or challenge. She is a victim of constitutional anxiety.

It is important for us to recognize that we may have to face weaknesses which had their origin either in our heredity, or in factors in our environment that shaped our way of thinking before we had power to control them.

If this is your situation you need to recognize the fact that you have a problem. Your struggle will of necessity be more difficult, but you can find the way to full control of those besetting anxieties by following the disciplines that are available to you.

It is encouraging to know that many of these childhood expressions of anxiety disappear with maturity. Family and home responsibilities tend to bring release. Yet the anxiety may still remain, pushed into the subconscious. The perilous side of the problem is that such anxiety is often transferred to our children who, themselves, become victims of hypersensitiveness. It is out of such second-generation experiences that anxiety may become abnormal. We have an obligation to ourselves, and to our loved ones, to endeavor to understand and control these threats to inner peace and happiness.



ABNORMAL ANXIETY

It remains for us to consider the fact that normal anxiety is dangerous, unless confronted and conquered, because it sometimes contributes to mental illness of a serious nature.

In terms of psychiatry excessive and uncontrolled worry becomes what is known as an anxiety-neurosis. The core of such illness is expectant dread, or persistent and uncontrolled apprehension. The individual victim seldom understands the cause for his fear. He tells us that he is afraid, but he cannot pinpoint the source or reason. His own explanation, if he offers one, is usually in error.

The victim of anxiety-neurosis is usually afraid of crowds, of high places, of thunderstorms, of the dark, or of any one of a score of situations that are usually accepted as a normal part of life. Almost always these phobias have their foundation in childhood experiences. Frequently they can be dispelled if the individual is helped to understand the reason for his fear.

Because of the interdependence between the mind and the body the victim of anxiety-neurosis generally is troubled by numerous physical ailments, such as dizziness, stomach upsets, headaches, fast-beating heart, or choking or smothering sensations.

The devastating results of an extreme form of anxiety upon the mind and

the body make it essential that we endeavor to learn more about the nature and cure of this common cause of unhappiness. No other mental problem is more universal, and no mental state holds greater possibilities of disaster for the personality unless it is kept under effective control.



THE TREATMENT OF ANXIETY

PRACTICAL and vital religion is the best cure for anxiety of every type. Helpful experiments have been conducted in numerous mental institutions, indicating that close cooperation between the psychiatrist and the clergyman brings relief to victims of anxiety-neurosis. A definitely Christian faith cannot fail to act as a medicine for you if you are a victim of normal, constitutional, or extreme anxiety.

In the sixth chapter of the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus of Nazareth makes it clear that the real antidote for worry is a vital faith in God - not only in His existence, but in His love and concern for every individual. Christ did not expect his followers to be unconcerned about what happened to them, or to others. He felt anguish when he was confronted by man's sin and suffering. He wept sorrowfully over a city. He triumphed over personal agony; and He proclaimed a faith that enables men to face the worst that life can bring. He dramatized unforgettably the assurance of peace in the midst of storm. The stillness which followed the wild tempest on the Sea of Galilee was symbolic of the peace that can rule the life of any Christian who is buffeted by the storms and stresses of daily living.

Is it not perplexing that so many of us who profess the Christian faith are victims of anxiety? The explanation of this paradox is found in the fact that many of us fail to claim the resources that faith offers us. Belief, too, often consists of mere affirmations, rather than a vital trust in God, and an awareness of His presence.

For several years I called regularly upon a woman who was a victim of arthritis. She was unable to move a single muscle. She had suffered for twenty years in this state, and there was no hope for improvement. For a few hours each week she was carried to the window of her room where she could look upon a small area of earth and sky. In every conversation she talked gaily about cloud formations she had noted, or of changes which she had seen in the tiny bit of ground within the range of her vision. It was an uplifting experience to be in her presence. Her faith was buoyant. Her inner peace made my anxieties seem trivial. She was not indifferent to pain, but she had learned what it means to appropriate a power strong enough to make her triumphant.

Beyond the importance of faith itself, the teachings of Jesus suggest three rules which offer hope to all of us who battle with anxiety.

In the **FIRST** place, strive to accept situations which cannot be altered. We usually adapt ourselves to the fact that people who are seventy years old cannot move the clock back thirty or forty years. If we have made a mistake, there is no point in worrying about it. We may be able to rectify the harm which our mistake brought to another person. We may even be able to use the mistake to

avoid further errors, or to help us develop new areas in our character, but the fact itself cannot be altered.

A young man of my acquaintance was driving a car that was involved in an accident, in part because of his carelessness. His younger brother was crippled for life. He became servant to his invalid brother. But, with it all, he felt helpless and disturbed. Then one day his brother said to him gaily: "I have more fun than any boy I know." That night he faced reality for the first time. Regret was of no use either to him or his brother. He decided that he could help the one he loved to enjoy a limited, but full, life. He accepted the situation as it was.

There is meaning and strength in the prayer:

"God give me the serenity
To accept the things I cannot change,
The courage to change the things I can,
And the wisdom to know the difference."

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In the SECOND place, put spiritual principles first in your scale of values. Most of our anxieties center on material or physical things rather than spiritual. It is a plain fact that the possession of money and property often creates additional anxieties. Jesus said: "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of things he possesseth." It is a difficult discipline to follow, but freedom from anxiety depends for most of us upon a transformation in our standard of values until spiritual rewards and spiritual goals become most important. When that happens we gain release from the bonds of our anxiety.

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In the THIRD place, try earnestly to live a day at a time. Sir William Osler, the eminent British physician, urged his students to "undress their souls" as they undress their bodies before retiring each night. He meant that they were not to brood over the mistakes or failures of the day.

You will avoid the nagging pangs of anxiety if you will close the books on each day before you go to bed at night. Of course it is essential that you decide to right the wrongs done to anyone during the day before you seek rest, but avoid the temptation to live over the failures, and to dip deeply into the regrets. Close the books. Even if you have not lived at your highest and best, forget it until the dawn opens the pages on a new day.

Nor is the past the only temptation which must be avoided. The indefinite future can also become a reason for anxiety. Let it wait for tomorrow. Peaceful rest will store up energy by which the future can be an adventure which ends in victory.

In the struggle for inner peace it is important for all of us to look hopefully toward the future, however uncertain the present may seem to be. A plane in which I was a passenger was caught in a dense fog while approaching a

city. We circled for more than an hour. I am certain we were in no danger, though lofty mountains ringed the area. Yet my anxiety increased as the moments passed. I found myself considering what insurance I owned, what my loved ones would do, should the airplane crash. I managed to build up a tenseness that made for nausea and fear. Then I considered what a person of faith ought to do in those circumstances. I whispered words of assurance and trust from the Bible. I turned my thoughts toward the pleasure of reunion with friends who were awaiting my arrival at the airport. I considered with pleasure the plans which had been made for the following days. Gradually the anxiety disappeared. The tense muscles became relaxed. A quiet peace filled my mind. When at last the plane pushed through the fog to make a safe landing I was prepared physically and spiritually for what lay ahead.

Many of us are victims of anxiety when we consider future possibilities. Remember that most of the tragedies we foresee for the future never occur. The most distressing experiences are worse in anticipation than in reality. Furthermore, God has given us grace sufficient for every need. In this assurance we may claim today strength sufficient to overcome every anxiety, and peace in the midst of the most turbulent hours.



AFFIRMATION

I am never my best self when victimized by anxiety,
so I will:

strive to accept situations that cannot
be changed.

think first every day of spiritual values
and goals.

endeavor to live each day as God entrusts
life to me.

look hopefully to what tomorrow may bring.

trust God for guidance and strength.

Blessings,

YOUR INSTRUCTOR.