

A Biblical Counseling Case Study

The Anatomy of Anxiety: God’s Prescription for Victory *In* Anxiety



Promoting Personal Change Centered on the Person of Christ
—Ephesians 4:15

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*Promoting Personal Change Centered on the Person of Christ
Through the Personal Ministry of the Word*

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Presentation Focus

In our time together, we will walk with “Mike” through his struggles with anxiety and fear. We’ll examine together how to implement a Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Consummation theological perspective on the anatomy of anxiety.

Building upon this comprehensive descriptive assessment, we’ll ponder together how to help “Mike” biblically and relationally to find victory *in* anxiety.

This robust, relational case study is a remedy for
“take two verses and call me in the morning.”

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The Anatomy of Anxiety: God's Prescription for Victory *In* Anxiety

- **The Big Picture # 1:** Victory _____ or Victory _____?
- **The Big Picture # 2:** How Not to Do It—"Take Two _____ and _____ Me in the Morning!"
 - Overcoming fear and anxiety is a relational discipleship _____, not an exhortation _____.
 - Facing fear and anxiety is a _____ process involving the _____ person in their _____ life situation.
- **The Big Picture # 3:** "Mike"—Pursuing Victory *in* Anxiety (See Case Study Handout)
- **Case Study Interaction # 1:** How could these introductory concepts and pictures impact how you relate to and counsel someone (like Mike) pursuing victory *in* anxiety?

I. A Biblical Anatomy of Anxiety: Thinking Theologically about Anxiety

- We Need a _____ Model

A. Creation: Mood Order—Vigilance

1. Vigilance: Called to _____ Duty

2. _____ or Worriers

- **Case Study Interaction # 2:** How could the theological category of "vigilance" impact how you relate to and counsel someone (like Mike) pursuing victory *in* anxiety?

B. Fall: Mood Disorder—Stuck Vigilance

1. Failing to _____ the Garden

2. The Family _____ of Anxiety

- **Case Study Interaction # 3:** How could the theological category of "stuck vigilance" impact how you relate to and counsel someone (like Mike) pursuing victory *in* anxiety?

C. Redemption: Mood Reorder—Clinging to God

1. Choosing to _____ in the Garden

2. When Anxiety Stalks, Faith _____

- **Case Study Interaction # 4:** How could the theological category of “clinging to God” impact how you relate to and counsel someone (like Mike) pursuing victory *in* anxiety?

D. Consummation: Mood Healing—Cured by God

1. Our Promise Tomorrow: Victory _____!

2. Our Goal Today: _____ in the Midst and _____ Living through it All

- **Case Study Interaction # 5:** How could the theological categories of “tomorrow’s promise and today’s goal” impact how you relate to and counsel someone (like Mike) pursuing victory *in* anxiety?

II. God’s Prescription for Victory *In* Anxiety: Comprehensive and Compassionate Care—Philippians as *a* Model

- **Paul’s Purpose: Gospel-Centered Vigilance**
- **Paul’s Model: Stand Firm!**

Comprehensive (Robust) and Compassionate (Relational) Care

- | | |
|--|--|
| • Relational/Spiritual Care: | Guard Your Relationship with God Your Guard |
| • Relational/Social Care: | Commit to Mature Relationships with God’s People |
| • Relational/Self Aware Care: | Cling to Your Identity in Christ |
| • Rational/Mental Care: | Put on the Mind of Christ |
| • Volitional/Motivational/Behavioral Care: | Practice What You Preach |
| • Emotional Care: | Soothe Your Soul in Your Savior |
| • Physical and Life Situational Care: | Live Wisely in a Fallen World |

- **Case Study Interaction # 6:** How could the biblical principle of “comprehensive and compassionate care” impact how you relate to and counsel someone (like Mike) pursuing victory *in* anxiety?

A. Guard Your Relationship with God Your Guard: Faith in Your Father

1. Renew Your Image of God

2. Engage in Worshipful Prayer Focused on God’s Character

3. Open Your Palms to God

- **Case Study Interaction # 7:** How could the biblical principle of “guard your relationship with God your Guard” impact how you relate to and counsel someone (like Mike) pursuing victory *in* anxiety?

B. Commit to Mature Relationships with God’s People: It Takes a Congregation

1. Live the Truth in Love: Spiritual Friends

2. Speak the Truth in Love: Spiritual Conversations

- GPS # 1: Empathy—“It’s Terrifying to Experience Anxiety”
 - GPS # 2: Encouragement—“It’s Possible to Experience Peace Even When You Feel Worried”
 - GPS # 3: Exposure—“It’s Horrible to Self-Protect, but Amazing to Be Forgiven”
 - GPS # 4—Empowerment—“It’s Supernatural to Trust and Defend”
- **Case Study Interaction # 8:** How could the biblical principle of “commit to mature relationships with God’s people” impact how you relate to and counsel someone (like Mike) pursuing victory *in* anxiety?

C. Cling to Your Identity in Christ: Wholeness in Christ

1. Understand Who You Are in and to Christ

2. Stir Up the Gift of God within You

- **Case Study Interaction # 9:** How could the biblical principle of “cling to your identity in Christ” impact how you relate to and counsel someone pursuing victory *in* anxiety?

D. Put on the Mind of Christ: The Weapons of Your Warfare

1. Renew Your Mind

2. Put Off Worldly Mindsets: Repent of Self-Sufficient and Self-Protective Thinking

3. Put On Christ-Centered Mindsets: Take Responsibility for Your Thought Life

- **Case Study Interaction # 10:** How could the biblical principle of “putting on the mind of Christ” impact how you relate to and counsel someone (like Mike) pursuing victory *in* anxiety?

E. Practice What You Preach: Living and Loving with Courage

1. Nike: Just Do It!

2. Replace Fearful Inaction with Other-Centered Action

3. Maintain a “Can Do” Spirit in Christ

- **Case Study Interaction # 11:** How could the biblical principle of “practice what you preach” impact how you relate to and counsel someone (like Mike) pursuing victory *in* anxiety?

F. Soothe Your Soul in Your Savior: Emotional Maturity 101

1. Gain a Biblical Perspective on Emotions

2. Cast Your Cares on Him

- **Case Study Interaction # 12:** How could the biblical principle of “soothe your soul in your Savior” impact how you relate to and counsel someone (like Mike) pursuing victory *in* anxiety?

G. Live Wisely in a Fallen World: Jars of Clay

1. Embrace Physical Weakness: Physical Care

2. Get Off the Merry-Go-Round: Life-Situational Care

Commencement: Keep Clinging to Christ!

- **The Big Point:** Imagine...
- **The Big Question:** Related to victory *in* anxiety, what will you do differently in your life and ministry as a result of our biblical study together?
- **Resources for Your Life and Ministry:** *Soul Physicians, Spiritual Friends, God’s Healing for Life’s Losses, Equipping Counselors for Your Church, Anxiety: Anatomy and Cure, Sexual Abuse: Beauty for Ashes*

Case Study: “Mike”

- **Note:** For confidentiality, “Mike” is not the real name of the individual in this case study. Details of the case study have been altered to maintain “Mike’s” confidentiality.

Mike is thirty-five; he has been married for twelve years. He and his wife have three children, ranging in age from four to ten. Mike is a college graduate with a Master’s degree in business. He has been very successful in the work world and has advanced to a high level in the company where he works.

Mike was raised in a Christian home and came to Christ as a pre-teen. His father was a successful businessman who owned his own company. His mother was an elementary school principal. Mike is an only-child. Mike describes his parents as being “very driven” and as having set “incredibly high standards for me.” Mike describes himself as “the good kid who always did what he was told and always strove for excellent and even perfectionism in sports and school.”

He notes that he has always faced some low-grade anxiety when stress was high—“my way of coping was to work harder, faster, wiser.” He calls himself a “life-long worrier.” But he added, “From one perspective, it worked! My hard work paid off—I was an all-state baseball player; I graduated second in my class in high school. But from another perspective it never worked for me in that I’ve never had peace. Everyone sees me as altogether, but I always feel like I’m one failure away from falling apart.”

By Mike’s own admission, he is a “helicopter parent” who hovers over his three children much the way his parents did with him. However, he sees himself and his wife as “much more encouraging and affirming than my parents ever were with me.”

A year before Mike came for pastoral counseling, he was in an automobile accident caused by a drunk-driver. Mike was the only one in the car, and sustained a concussion and several broken bones. He missed three months of work which, “were the hardest three months of my life. I worried constantly about the pile of work that I would face upon my return. I worried even more about whether I’d be replaced—if they would find out that they could manage just fine without me.”

When Mike returned to work, he discovered that, “some of my concerns were valid. The pile of work was almost insurmountable. And a co-worker who had come up the ranks with me had been given a promotion I had worked hard for.” In response, Mike drove himself to new heights of “both worry and work.” The stress became “almost unbearable. I couldn’t sleep. I was agitated and impatient. I had two occurrences of what I guess you would call panic attacks. I finally went to my doctor for some help...”

When Mike came to counseling, he was on Paxil, which he took reluctantly and secretly (only his wife knew) because, “I’m embarrassed that I can’t handle this on my own.” Mike was “praying and fasting regularly, devouring the Word and trying to apply it to everything in my life.” As he described it, “It’s almost like I’m an OCD Christian—driven to be a perfect Christian so I can manage this anxiety better.”

When asked during the first session what he hoped for from counseling, Mike responded, in part, “I want my joy back. I want my peace back. In fact, I want joy and peace for the first time in my life. And I want to be a better husband and parent—I’m so focused on my work worries that I feel I’m a distracted spouse and dad. And I want a right relationship with God. I’ve read enough to know that I’m pretty much like the older son in the parable of the prodigal son—it’s all about works for me...which I know is not what Christianity is all about...”