

Managing Stress and Anxiety

Introduction

This is the first edition of *Managing Stress and Anxiety*. I hope that as you read and do the exercises in this book you will gain more insight into your behaviour, and be able to take the steps to practice and internalize the suggestions.

I believe the Word of God has everything we need for healing, restoration and transformation. God has placed everything in it that will enable you to pass through any season of your life. He has the answers to whatever you are struggling with.

In this eBook, I will teach you how to apply this Word to anxiety and depression. It is ironic that I have applied the concepts and activities to daily individual struggles. These are proven methods I have taught to hundreds as I travel and speak nationally, helping men and women find hope in Christ.

Joanna Daniel

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Chapter One

Emotional wounds and our thoughts

One thing seems to be consistent as I work with people day to day. Traumatic events can unsettle us and influence a negative pattern of thinking and feeling. This framework can start in early childhood and have a lasting impact and impression on our lives. More often than not, this has a negative effect on relationships, social situations, our physical, mental and spiritual health and sometimes employment.

The bridge to understanding and healing will lie in analyzing and facing past issues which play a role in your present. When this is identified, you will be on your way to gaining victory over a persistent situation. Healing sometimes lies in facing some difficult questions and seeking answers. These answers are in the Word of God. However, there are often difficulties in:

- Believing this Word
- Accepting that it applies to you and your current situation
- Believing that it is personal
- Applying the word to emotional situations

I have encountered many who are more comfortable with a theological explanation of the Bible than a personal one. How is this possible when God is a personal God? He cares about you on every level. Indeed we learn in Isaiah 53:5

***But He was wounded for our transgressions,
He was bruised for our iniquities;***

*The chastisement for our peace was upon Him,
And by His stripes we are healed.*

Nevertheless, this scripture is read with disbelief and there is hesitancy in believing its full application. Doubt is the root. As we go through this book I hope you will be able to pinpoint, eradicate and destroy it.

My story

As a child, I was afraid of my father for reasons unknown to me. I still vividly remember that night when he found out and took the decision to sort this out. I am grateful he valued my reaction and acted promptly. As time progressed, I would like to say he loved the fear out of me.

I believe the fear I had for my dad (with a serious persona) was projected very early onto God; so for many years I viewed him as a stern but pleasantly looking gentleman. I know He was there but not sure I could share anything with him. I saw Him as a kind of overseer; He was there to keep me in line.

If you are in the position of seeing God as out of reach and uncomfortable with talking to Him about that thing that brings anxiety, a good place to begin is asking the question: “why do I view God in this way?”

What needs to change in order for you to trust Him even with your deepest wound?

Emotional wounds are not only tied to events and situations from our past, they are also related to incidents that are happening in our here and now. Every day events can also have significant effect, leaving one temporarily without the ability to cope. I mentioned ‘temporarily’ because where you are presently does not have to be your permanent situation. A good place to begin might be to tell yourself right now that this is a short-term situation. It

may have been happening for a long time but it still does not have to accompany you to your future. You can make the decision to make today worth living.

Dissect your thoughts

Trauma or abuse in early life can significantly impact the rest of your story. This may be the fuel that is feeding your anxiety and depression. Understanding will therefore be crucial in helping you move forwards. For example, recognising and accepting the reason for feelings of anxiousness or low moods will be crucial in helping you overcome. Self-assessment is also important in any situation and the crucial part will be to examine and show sympathy for your wounded self. Additionally, being patient and empathic with self will be beneficial.

Managing crisis

- One of the first things you can do to initiate change is to take an inventory of your thoughts.
- Protect your senses. The senses are important so pay close attention as these are avenues through which you could feed or protect your mood. Sometimes the things we watch alter our moods and influence negative thoughts and feelings. You may be left with these feelings and be unaware of how they started and how to curb them.

Summary

- The Bible has the answer to your anxiety and depression.
- Fear can prevent you from fully believing the personal application of the word of God.
- Past events could be impacting your mood.
- It is important to guard your senses as a means of protecting yourself and managing stress.

Chapter Two

Emotional resilience

What is emotional resilience? According to the Collins dictionary (2011), ‘resilience is the ability to recover quickly from shock’. Emotional resilience would therefore be the ability to recover from circumstances that are traumatic or emotionally damaging.

How do we become resilient? Someone asked me this question after one of my presentations on *Developing a Healthy Mind*. The lady wanted to know what set some people apart. How can one person recover quickly from the same situation that will crush someone else? This was a tough question because there is no prescription. Some people develop resilience whilst others learn how to be strong by watching others.

I believe we can become tenacious and resilient by applying the Word of God to any situation. What I find amazing is that some of the people who are quote scriptures do not actually believe them for themselves.

Why? How is it possible that people can read the bible, quote its amazing promises, but do not believe them. That is an issue. The promises have no effect on your life until you start believing and acting on them.

I once did a talk on loneliness and social isolation and I unravelled some key points that brought me through my journey of healing and managing emotions.

- God takes immediate interest in our prayers.
- You can take to Him anything that bothers you.

Yes, that includes anxiety. Regardless of how small you perceive it to be, it is important to take it to God in prayer and believe that He hears, is interested, and will help you through it. It can be tempting to think that some of the issues you may be struggling with are not big or important enough for God. But He even cares for the sparrow.

Does He have the capacity to handle what I had to deal with?

I wanted to know if God had the capacity to deal with shame and anxiety. I was busy in church serving in different capacities, but as I went through my freefall time I lost trust in the word of God to help me. I stayed in a place of darkness until one day He spoke through the silence.

You see, God cannot speak when you are so busy with medicating, hiding, and finding solutions that blocks you from hearing and listening to His still small voice. This was Elijah's experience as He fled the wrath of Jezebel.

Then He said, "Go out, and stand on the mountain before the Lord." And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice.

So it was, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave. Suddenly a voice came to him, and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" 1 Kings 19: 11-13

One way to begin the conversation to find out whether He can manage your anxiety is to first put away all that could potentially be between you and Him. This will give you room to listen; really listen to what He has to say.

Does that sound frightening?

Am I asking you to let go of something that has helped you up till now? There may be a deep rooted problem if you are feeling threatened at the thought of letting go.

Be honest with yourself

Sometimes we maintain a certain emotional state because of the rewards. Do not stop reading yet. I promise that I will help you realize if you are making an unconscious decision to protect your anxiety, or if you really want to let go of it and get complete healing. You might be protecting you through finding ways to maintain self through these times. For example, it might be the time when you give yourself permission to eat more chocolate, indulge in more takeaways, gorge on television, put off making an important decision or get out and exercise.

If you were to honestly examine each of the aforementioned, which would resonate with you? If yours is not on the list, what do you use to soothe self in an effort to shield you from anxious thoughts and feelings? Remember, we are pursuing honesty and it is the radical decisions that will help you to identify, uproot and discard patterns of behaviour that have contributed to your anxiety for many years. It is the process of facing challenges, overcoming and growing that will enable you to develop the kind of resilience that will allow you to completely get rid of anxiety one day at a time.

Too good to be true

I can almost hear your thoughts: “It cannot be that easy”, you say. Of course I cannot read your thoughts, but I am referring to the many clients who often go silent at this simple suggestion. I would therefore encourage them not to be daunted by its simplicity, but to try these techniques one day at a time, and prepare for that day to add up to weeks and months. Usually we do not have to wait months for the results to manifest.

Resilience is developed through overcoming obstacles. Where many go wrong is in believing they do not have what it takes to tackle their challenges. Perhaps we do not, but the word of God has everything we need for every emergency. For example, Philippians 4:6, 'Be careful

for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your request be made known unto God.'

Summary

- God cares about everything that affects us.
- When we honestly assess our thoughts it will unearth crucial insight into our current emotional state.

Chapter Three

Self-denying in our thoughts

The concept of being self-denying in our thoughts is a crucial one. It helps to restore peace, lessen anxiety and maintain clarity. This is done by choosing to forget self (you) even in situations that are hurtful. When practised, this can have a powerful effect on your life. For example, a new situation has arisen at work and your thoughts are telling you that others are gossiping about you. At this time, self-denying means you will (even though it might hurt) choose to think about the impact of gossip on the people who engage in it, or choose to think about how the situation will impact the team. This is opposed to the thoughts of “I am not liked”, “what will I do if I lose this job” or any other thought of self that will spring up at this time.

A true story

My parents were visiting my brother in Connecticut and had to go to New York for an appointment. They had also made plans to meet with an old friend for lunch and arranged for my uncle to pick them up. They had planned on spending the night at his house. The only trouble was that they had forgotten to communicate this to my brother. As the day progressed the friend whom they were due to meet could not locate them and decided to call the house. My brother was home and for the first time found out about their plans. Perhaps simultaneously he began to worry about the crime rate in New York and his two elderly parents somewhere in that big city with no means of communication.

When contact was finally made, he allowed his pent up feelings to unfurl. I spoke to my father later and he was his usual calm self. My brother had allowed his thoughts of “what

if?” to take over which increased stress and anxiety. How could he apply the concept of being self-denying in his thoughts in such an emotional situation?

This is noteworthy because it is usually in sensitive situations that we are challenged the most to forget self and maintain clarity. If we can overcome at these times, it will then become easier for us to tackle bigger issues where the results are more far-reaching. The problem is that we allow our thoughts to take over, and as a result we lose the ability to reason rationally. What principle can we follow that will enable us to successfully navigate this area, and gain control of our thoughts in an effort to lessen and conquer anxiety?

The principle

Casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor.10:5).

The Application

Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things. (Philippians 4:8)

It will take willpower to train your thoughts to adapt to the aforesaid. You do not have to be daunted by that, will power is choice power. That means you have the power to choose to direct your thoughts in other ways, as opposed to dwelling on those subjects that cause worry and concern and heightened your anxiety.

Summary

- Practice self-denying thoughts which can help lessen anxiety.

Chapter Four

Adjust your thinking and change how you feel

Our thoughts have enormous impact on how we feel. Adjust how you think about your current situation and you will start to feel different about it. For example, John struggles with high blood pressure and has also developed a pattern of worrying which extends to most areas of his life. He is also prone to negative thinking and has a very grey outlook on life. John makes excuses for all his behaviour and does not try any suggestions. His initial response is usually “it will not work” or “I cannot do it.”

Unfortunately, John has trapped himself in a world where nothing works. His blood pressure remains high and he is heavily dependent on his doctor for help. He also refuses to try anything that will enable him to live a richer and fuller life. There are periods when it appears that he would like to change. However, his illness has garnered him a lot of attention and sympathy.

Has John trapped himself in a cycle that is difficult for him to break free from? Let us examine his attitude of always blocking help with “it will not work”, “I cannot do it”. He will never be able to do it until he tries. I can appreciate that the thought of attempting change can sometimes be a challenge. Moreover, our thoughts about change are usually more terrifying and upsetting than change itself.

Our thoughts can generate anxious or even depressive feelings. The way you think about your situation will greatly impact any moves you make towards recovery and healing. If you are thinking: “my trauma is too horrific”, “my past is too traumatic”, or “my wound is too deep,” chances are you will begin to feel more hurt. You will begin to listen to the lie of ‘you

cannot get past this’ and could almost begin to see anxiety as a way of helping you deal with the wounds of emotional pain. On the other hand, if you tell yourself that it is hard but you can work through it, you will begin to change.

Have you ever heard this old saying, ‘I think therefore I am’?

Over the course of the week a pattern will emerge that will help you identify activating events, your beliefs about those events and the impact that they have on you. Use the table below to make a list and highlight patterns in your thoughts and feelings.

A.

Activating event / trigger	Thoughts	Feelings	Beliefs

Sometimes it can be hard to identify the beliefs behind an event; however this is crucial because it is the way we think about a situation that causes it to impact us or not. Be patient with yourself. Show yourself sympathy and kindness. This will give you the space to analyse your thoughts and feelings without judgement.

I will give an example of how to identify beliefs:

B.

Trigger	Thoughts	Feelings	Beliefs
A telephone call about an overdue bill.	Panic, I have no money to pay this outstanding bill.	Feeling sick, angry, frustrated, sad.	I believe bills should be paid on time. I do not like to be in debt.

Beliefs should really be at the beginning because it is the driving force behind my thoughts and feelings. Because I have values around debt, it influences how I respond to the trigger in this example. The way to address my feelings of frustration, sadness and anger is to assess my thoughts and reassess my values around debt. It may appear like this:

C.

Trigger	New Thoughts	Feelings
A telephone call about an overdue bill.	<p>I wish that was not the case, as I do not like to be in debt. I cannot afford to pay right now but I will pay as soon as I can.</p> <p>What adjustments can I make to prevent this in the future?</p>	Understanding, relief.

As you can see from box C, the outcome was very different as I gave myself the space to think through the situation. I was also honest about my view of debt. Honesty in assessing values is essential; it will help you quickly find the root of your negative automatic thoughts.

Summary

- Our thoughts impacts how we feel.
- The belief we hold about a situation can influence how we feel.

Chapter Five

Anxious thoughts and feelings

Be anxious for nothing but in everything with prayer and supplication and with thanksgiving let your request be made known unto God. And the peace of God which passes all understanding will guard your hearts and mind until the day of Jesus Christ.

Philipians 4: 6

I get excited just thinking about the peace of God. Have you ever felt that? What exactly is it? It may be like me thinking “*what is that? Sign me up please!*” or “how do I get the peace of God?” Let us go back to the beginning where we were encouraged to be anxious for nothing.

Be anxious for nothing

What is your anxiety based around? What are those things that overwhelm you and threaten your peace? I am a worker and I love working, I also home-school three children, two of which are boys with boundless energies who constantly want to play tennis and football. As I write, they are exercising with a YouTube video - this is after playing tennis all day and going for a walk with me. While I walked, they ran. Notwithstanding that busy life I have just described, I tend to put too much on my ‘to-do’ list. The day will progress and I would feel like I am not accomplishing enough, and the anxious thoughts will try to gain entrance. At that point I might be tuning in to the fact that mommy has been called for the thousandth time to look at this or that, or to be told “my finger itches,” or I would be asked questions such as “what am I smelling?” or the many other hundred things that mommies have to attend to.

I once found myself in such situation. It was a school holiday and I had a client and a long to-do list. I could feel the tension mounting as I told myself I must accomplish something today.

Can you spot the anxious thoughts or the phrases that preceded my initial anxiety?

- “I must accomplish something today.”
- “Long list of things to do.”
- “I am not doing enough.”

If we should scrutinise each of these, we will discover that each of them have flaws. Just giving yourself the space to do this will help you greatly when bombarded with anxious thoughts. Let us examine them.

“I must accomplish something today” – “I would like to do a few things on my list”

Why does that make a difference? I believe the success of my day will be determined by how I view success. For instance, when I decided to go for a walk with the children, it helped with perspective and I felt better on returning home. After praying I made the decision to focus on accomplishing two things. I also gave myself the room not to have them completed. Note I said ‘accomplished’ not ‘completed’. I was redefining what success was for me that day. I spent quality time with the children, tuned in to their questions and went for a walk. Result? When I assessed my list, I realised that I was over zealous in my planning and not very realistic. The pressure was relieved as I made the decision to be honest with myself.

So what was driving that zeal?

1. To be honest, the need to earn, fast.
2. I was also measuring myself by what others had accomplished and this added pressure. I had no idea how long they had been in the race or what they had sacrificed to get there.

3. I had temporarily forgotten some important fundamental things, like the fact that my children are most important to me; any other activity was a bonus.

My values gave me the fuel to reassess and lessen my anxiety. This can also be the problem, however, your values may be the very reason you are battling anxiety. You may need to honestly examine them and be prepared to change them. For example, our values are sometimes based around messages that we receive from parents, the media and other sources. One might say (insert your surname here) never quit, or (insert your name) never fails. These are enormous messages to hear. As a result of hearing these we may build the kind of life that will ensure you are not the (insert name) that fails or gives up.

This is huge pressure because you may feel honour-bound to continue on a path that is causing you stress and anxiety, and not feel like there is any way out. However, if we return to our scripture 'be anxious for nothing' this would also equal 'do not be anxious over whether or not you fail' or 'it is time to move on from something and try something else'. This will only continue to be mere words unless you let go of that message enough to give it a try.

Some things that can cause us to hold on to negative messages:

Fear

- Fear of what the family will say.
- Fear of what the community will think.
- Fear of what people will say about me.

Fear can be crippling and debilitating, especially the fear of what people will say. This has the power to keep you in bondage unless you allow yourself to be untangled from the pressures of what people think. Easier said than done, you may be thinking: “Not so hard”.

Mind reading is dangerous; you do not know what people are thinking therefore chances are you will be wrong. Some may be vocal enough to actually say how they feel. The question should be: “regardless of who they are, did you acquiesce to their opinion on your life?” If the answer to this is no, their opinion should not be taken on board. You might feel because they are a sister, mother, father, friend, elderly person etc. that they get to give their opinion. Have a healthy respect for all the aforesaid; nevertheless have boundaries around how much control you allow them to have over your life. When the fear is managed, the thinking scrutinised and the control taken back this is where peace will attend you.

Summary

- Fear of people's opinion could be influencing anxiety.
- Surrounding values could also be a contributing factor to anxiety.

Chapter Six

Physical health and anxiety

Physical, mental and spiritual health is important. These are all interrelated. There is no way that you will be enjoying good spiritual health if you are stressed, anxious or depressed, and that is one of the main reasons for this book. I would like to help you regain the balance you once had so that you can enjoy good mental, spiritual and physical health.

Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint. Isaiah 40:30-31

I remember many years ago when a friend and I decided to take some time off church to have a morning of fasting and prayer. I also recall that we used the text above and I was asked where I was spiritually. I remember saying barely walking though I would like to soar. As I reflect on that period, one of the main reasons for the limping was that I had recently emigrated and the cultural differences like food, environment, weather and everything, were so alien.

To my knowledge, settling in took a long time. I did not recognise it then, but I was literally mourning for the loss of what I knew. All I knew was to soldier on. I did not know how to name what I was feeling and confront the issue. This festered and later took me to a dark place. I am sharing that story to reinforce the connection between the spiritual and mental. So, how does the physical connect with all that?

Fresh air and exercise are immeasurably relevant to the maintenance of good mental health. I recommend outdoor exercise. For example, a walk around the block after lunch will increase your capacity to think clearly and give you renewed vigour for the rest of the day.

Exercise

Going for a walk in open air will invigorate and refresh you.

How can this help to lessen anxiety? 30 minutes of exercise daily helps to speed up the heart rate, calms nerves and clear your mind. This will give you the ability to think clearly, and can also help to manage stress.

Keep a record for seven days. At the end of the seventh day, review your attitude and feelings about the activity at the start and during the week.

Day one	Feelings before exercise	Exercise	Thoughts & feelings afterwards	Record your overall impression of the activity.
Day Two				
Day Three				
Day Four				
Day Five				
Day Six				

Summary

- Physical, mental and spiritual health are all interconnected.
- Exercise could help to lessen anxiety and influence good physical and mental health.

About the Author

Joanna Daniel is an author, speaker and counsellor who has spoken around England with a healing message of hope from the gospel. Her favourite scripture, Isaiah 53:5 forms the basis of her work and ministry:

But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.

Joanna is passionate about showing people that these scars can be applied to emotional pain. She does this through retreats, books and presentations where women are enabled to develop confidence in applying the word of God to their situation, thereby setting them free to live the life that God intended them to have.

Joanna is also a wife and mother. She currently lives in Wales with her husband and three children. She runs a private practice offering face-to-face, video and telephone counselling. Additionally, she is a homeschooling mom who enjoys walking, blogging and reading.

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