

Part Three: The Way Out

Session 17

Overcoming Your Anxiety and Fear, Part 1

“Then the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, “Where are you?” 10 He said, “I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself.”” Genesis 3:9-10

A. Understanding the Nature of Your Emotions

1. Emotions are bodily sensations—_____—triggered by changes in body chemistry.ⁱ
 - a. *Bodily* _____ and *trauma* change body chemistry and can affect “feelings.”
 - Most notable are dysfunction in the endocrine or central nervous system,ⁱⁱ fatigue, infections, and post surgery effects.
 - “Down feelings” in themselves are not sinful and can be purely physically induced.
 - The body and heart interact with each other in important ways.
 - 1) The _____ can be a stumbling block to the heart.
 - 2) The _____ can be a stumbling block to the body.
 - b. *Ingested* _____ change body chemistry.
 - 1) _____ taken for nonpsychiatric problems are the single most frequent cause of negative feelings that mimic counseling problems.ⁱⁱⁱ
 - 2) _____ is the most widely used drug in the U.S. Over-consumption is the stimulus behind many anxious feelings of agitation.
 - c. _____ changes body chemistry.
 - 1) Choices about _____ change body chemistry.
 - _____ stimulates the release of endorphins (a morphine-like hormone), which produces a euphoric feeling. Exercise dissipates excessive adrenaline.
 - Your choices about whether and how much you exercise affect the way you _____.
 - 2) Choices about _____ change body chemistry.
 - Most people are sleep deprived. In addition, they are seldom fully relaxed—mentally and physically. A relaxed body and mind actually turn off the effects of the sympathetic nervous system (adrenaline and cortisol production, and so forth).
 - Your body will not _____ while you _____.
 - Your _____ will rest when your _____ is at rest.
 - Your _____ determine when you sleep and, generally, how well you sleep and, therefore, affect the way you feel.
 - 3) Choices about _____ change body chemistry.
 - You choose what you put into your _____. It affects the way you feel.
 - d. _____ change body chemistry.
 - 1) The _____ and _____ of your mind affect the way you feel.
 - 2) Thoughts are _____ we make to _____—the words we say to ourselves. Worry is not a _____; it _____ a feeling.
 - 3) Ultimately, to conquer worry, you must begin tracking and challenging your _____, not tracking and reacting to your _____.

2. _____ are like the warning lights on the dashboard of our cars; they indicate there is a problem “under the hood”—with our thoughts.^{iv}
 - a. The body mediates what the heart _____.
 - God made our bodies to be servants to our _____.
 - b. Thoughts are the _____; emotions are the _____.
 - Thoughts are the initiators of the negative emotions of anxiety, fear, panic, frustration, bitterness, anger, discouragement, despair (depression), hatred, and so forth.
 - Thoughts are the initiators of the positive emotions of romance, joy, love, peace, a “sense of well-being,” contentment, and so forth.
3. *While thoughts of the heart change body chemistry—and therefore, feelings—no body chemistry generates thoughts.* Thoughts _____ originate in the heart. That is why God holds us responsible for our thoughts. Thoughts are addressed by the Scriptures. Therefore, these are *spiritual* issues. Here is what God says about our thoughts:
 - a. *Mark 7:21—“ For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts...”*
 - b. *II Corinthians 10:5—We are to be “taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.”*
 - c. *Hebrews 4:12—The Word of God is the final judge of our thoughts as it is “able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”*
 - The point of this discussion is to see that _____—our “feelings”—are indeed chemically induced, but “chemical imbalances” are not our problems. Our lifestyle *choices* and the way we *think* about life and its challenges change body chemistry and, therefore, drive the vast majority of our negative emotions.
 - Furthermore, it is a mistake to be focusing on how we “feel” when the scriptural focus is on how we are _____ and _____.

B. Understanding the Source of Your Fear

1. _____ is a subset of the broader emotion of fear.
2. The emotion of fear is a result of the _____.
 - Before the Fall Adam experienced no sense of _____ (Genesis 3:9-10).
3. Since the Fall, fear is _____—and not sinful—when...
 - a. It serves as a _____ to alert us to physical and spiritual danger.
 - b. It serves as a _____ to motivate us to physical or spiritual readiness.
4. Fear is _____—and not helpful—when in our unbelief we allow anxiety to stop us from fulfilling biblical responsibilities.
5. Anxiety is the _____ of responding to the uncertainties of life with a wrong view of _____.
 - You create your own anxiety by the way you think about _____. This is why the Scriptures can command, “*Be anxious for nothing (Philippians 4:6)*” and “*Do Not Fear (Isaiah 41:10)*.” You are responsible for your own anxious, fearful thoughts.
 - Scripture is encouraging because it means that with God’s help, you can do something about your fear. Your situation is never hopeless.

“But he who listens to me shall live securely [in certainty] And will be at ease from the dread of evil.” (Proverbs 1:33).

“My son, do not forget my teaching, But let your heart keep my commandments; For length of days and years of life and peace they will add to you.” (Proverbs 3:1-2).

C. Reviewing the Path from Unbelief to Anxious Thoughts

1. _____ thoughts—“*God is not doing enough for me to feel safe; God Himself is not enough for me to feel safe. I need something more.*”
 - “Something more” thoughts come in many flavors: *I must have control, knowledge, high performance, safety, possessions, and so forth.*
2. _____ thoughts
 - a. *If only I had/knew/could avoid/could get...*

- b. *I should be/have...*
 - c. *I don't like...*
3. Anxious thoughts
- a. *What if...*
 - b. Worriers meditate upon _____ (possibilities) rather than upon the certainties of what God is and what He has promised His children.
 - c. Anxiety-generated noise in your soul follows the dynamic below:

Sense of Uncertainty: *I am not safe! I must have something more.*

Discontent with Uncertainty: *I don't like not having the certainty I want.*

Effort to Achieve Certainty by My Own Control: *I'll do whatever it takes to get the certainty I want.*

By contrast, a biblical approach to vulnerability would follow this dynamic:

Sense of Certainty: *I am safe in God's care.*

Content with Present Situation: *I don't need anything more to do God's will today.*

Freedom to Serve God and Others: *I can put all my effort into serving God and others today.*

CONCLUSION: Our noisy souls will rest from negative emotions—including fear—when our _____ and our _____ reflect that we are living in the reality of a God Who is more than enough for us.

ⁱ This discussion about changes in body chemistry is based upon known biological processes at work primarily in the autonomic nervous and endocrine systems. These are proven chemical changes that affect feelings. These chemical changes are not to be confused with the “chemical imbalance in the brain” theories promoted by the pharmaceutical industry as causes for psychiatric problems.

ⁱⁱ Endocrine dysfunctions that can produce “down feelings” include hyperthyroidism, hyperparathyroidism, hypothyroidism, hypoparathyroidism, Cushing’s disease, Addison’s disease, premenstrual syndrome, and hyperaldosteronism. Central nervous system dysfunctions that can produce “down feelings” include Parkinson’s disease, infections, vascular disease (stroke), tumors, epilepsy, narcolepsy, multiple sclerosis, Wilson’s disease, and Alzheimer’s disease. Source: *Counselor’s Guide to the Brain and Its Disorders* by Edward T. Welch (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), 211.

ⁱⁱⁱ Medications whose side effects mimic anxiety include “anesthetics, pain medications, medications to dilate the bronchi in the lungs, antispasm medications, insulin, thyroid medications, antihistamines, decongestants, blood pressure medications, cortisone type medications, heart medications, oral contraceptives, antiparkinsonism medications, ... diet medications (including those nonprescription ones and some weight reducing nutritional products—‘fat burners’—that may contain ephedrine), and lithium.” Robert D. Smith, MD, *The Christian Counselor’s Medical Desk Reference* (Stanley, NC: Timeless Texts, 2000), 366.

^{iv} Adapted from an illustration used in *Competent to Counsel* by Jay E. Adams (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1970), 94-95.