

REV. MATTHEW HOGAN

# BEAT ANXIETY BIBLICALLY

Master Two Winning Strategies



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Reverend Matthew Hogan  
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REVEREND MATTHEW HOGAN

## Thanks, Welcome, and Hello

First off, I want to thank you for downloading this resource and joining me for my mailing list. So welcome! I promise not to spam you! I'll send you a snippet of my weekly blog post and sometimes share other authors or ministries that you might like. I also have a short survey available to you and I try to answer questions that come from the survey through my blog.

Hello, I am Reverend Matthew Hogan. I am a Pastoral Counselor licensed by the National Christian Counselors Association as a Certified Temperament Pastoral Counselor and Licensed Pastoral Counselor. I meet online with any person or family or group online. You can find out more about me at <https://revmatthewhogan.com/counselor/>. And of course, you can contact me through my website at <https://revmatthewhogan.com/>.

I'm also the author of *How to be a Christian in Today's World: Shame or Fear of Failure vs. Living Confidently in God's Love*. In it, I take you on an easy to read but well researched walk through my own life as an example of learning about God's love and how if you really understand it and let Him in, then you can walk away from the anxiety of being a "good Christian."

## **Anxiety**

It's a hidden struggle among many Christians, a topic that often gets swept under the rug. For some, it carries a stigma of failure or inadequacy in our faith, and that kind of thinking can be incredibly damaging. We end up piling more anxiety on ourselves, believing we have to keep it all together. The same goes for men who feel the pressure to tough it out because that's what our culture tells us. Admitting to anxiety feels like admitting weakness.

As a counselor, I've worked with countless individuals (I honestly lost count years ago) and no matter why they sought help, anxiety was always there, affecting their lives and making their other issues even more challenging to overcome.

While counseling remains a less explored avenue, it's evident that many people grapple with the very same problems that others seek professional guidance for. The statistics paint a telling picture—around 20% of the population sought counseling in recent years, as per CDC studies<sup>1</sup>. Nevertheless, when we consider individuals engaged in extended therapy or those directed into counseling against their will, the percentage dwindles. Yet, it becomes increasingly apparent that the challenges people face permeate through our society, impacting a substantial portion, if not the majority, of our population.

This and my own observations tell me that anxiety is a public health crisis.

And a true health crisis it is. Studies have tied anxiety to insomnia, nightmares, and a plethora of health conditions throughout the body. And the more we age, the more dangerous those health issues become.

## **Disclaimer**

Anxiety is something that sometimes takes a period of time and effort to beat. There may be other factors that also need to be dealt with. And, maybe most importantly, the individual has to do the work to make the changes. There are no magic formulas or easy fixes. However, what I have included in this booklet are two scriptural passages (and how to apply them) that I use with everyone I help with anxiety. Whether these will be all a person needs or not, if diligently applied, they will surely help.

## The scriptures

There are a plethora of scriptures that will help with how we view God, our relationship to Him, and the world. But for anxiety specifically, let's look to the fourth chapter of Philippians. As much as 2 Corinthians 13 is the "Love Chapter," Philippians 4 is the "Peace Chapter." The entire chapter is excellent, but in particular, we're going to focus on just a few verses.

Philippians 4:4-8

"Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! <sup>5</sup> Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near. <sup>6</sup> Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

<sup>8</sup> Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things."<sup>2</sup>

I wish we had the room in this booklet to cover this entire passage, but it would be a large volume if I gave it the proper credit. Verse 4 instructs one to rejoice and this instruction goes all the way back to Leviticus. The problem is that most people haunted by anxiety, rejoicing is an unreasonable expectation and one that they have a hard time even understanding how to do. Verse 5 is equally difficult. What we find is that both become much easier when the rest of this section is made part of daily life.

### Step One

It may be counterintuitive, but just as we are putting off verses 4 through 7, we're going to start with verse 8. The steps I'm about to recommend are the exact same steps I give my counselees as homework. These are tried methods with a proven track record. Without follow through, there are no results.

Admittedly, I struggled for a long time with the concept of sharing these things because I have often had to encourage, push, and cajole people to do all the homework and be consistent. So, it is up to the reader to motivate themselves and by being persistent, consistent, and patient.

1. Use the browser on your smart phone and look up "Phil 4:8."
2. Go to the images tab and pick one you like.
3. Make that image your lock screen or home screen.
4. Every time you open your phone, read the list.

Do not neglect this next step!

5. With the list in front of you (true, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent, worthy of praise) write down a list of 5 things in your life that pass each test. In other words, think of something pleasant. Is it true? Is it pure? Is it lovely? Etc.

For a week, if you are faithful to the homework, this is all I want you to do.

Now, let's look at this verse a little. It gives us a list of things to think about. The version above says dwell on. Other translations might say meditate on. To me, to meditate on something is to have a laser focus on it. We do that with worries and fears and problems, don't we? We are biblically instructed to dwell on things that are true pure, lovely, commendable, excellent, and worthy of praise. Dwell on them. Focus on them. Just as studies have shown that crummy thoughts contribute to our bodies feeling crummy, the inverse is true. We can contribute to feeling better by thinking better. But as I mentioned earlier, it is a process that the individual has to commit to and be faithful to if they wish to find success.

After a week of faithfully reading the list every time you open your phone, and having a list of thoughts that pass the tests of Phil 4:8, then we're ready to begin moving on. (Hint: if you're not faithful to reading it every time you open your phone or it's not sticking in your memory, you made need another week before moving on.)

So, now that we have an idea of the list, let's put it to work! The better you are at asking yourself how you're feeling (how anxious you are) the better. I have a technique I teach for this, but it requires coaching to get it to work and to stick. But the idea here is to realize when you have anxiety. Ideally, over time, your tolerance for carrying anxiety will decrease. Meaning you'll carry less anxiety before you decide to take action.

Once you've decided you are anxious, then you listen to your own thoughts. We all have internal dialogue that we often aren't very aware of. It's like the old cartoons with an angel on one shoulder and a devil on the other. We all naturally have internal dialogues that can spike our anxiety in a very short time (often milliseconds). So, we have to eavesdrop on this internal dialogue. WHAT AM I THINKING?

Next, take that thought and run it through a series of tests.

**Is it true?** This one catches us up very easily. "My wife is going to be mad when I get home." "I'm going to get fired over that mistake I made at work." Are these true? When I ask that in counseling sessions, I get mixed answers. The point is this. If you don't know with absolute, 100% certainty, then it's not true!

**Is it pure?**

**Is it lovely?**

And go down the list. "I can't pay both my rent and car payment when I get paid on Friday." OK, that might pass the test of **True**. But is it lovely, commendable, excellent, and worthy of praise



to think about it at times when you can't do anything about it? I hope somewhere down the list you said "no."

So, you've realized you're anxious. You've determined the thought behind the anxiety (or one of them). Now you are going to ask one at a time if it meets the criteria of the list. If you get to one where the answer is no, then we move on to the next step.

We deliberately replace the thought. Remember that list I told you to make earlier? Those thoughts that do qualify when held up to the scrutiny of Philippians 4:8. Pick one. As the scripture says dwell on it or as other translations say, meditate on it. To me, meditating on something is to zoom in with laser like focus.

Here's the hard part. The old garbage thought, or another one, is going to be an uninvited guest. That's OK. You're learning a new skill. What do we tell kids when they fail at something they're learning? "Try again. Practice makes perfect." Guess what? That's pretty good advice! Also, like some kids, we can get frustrated over our stumbles. But if your child drops a ball when they're learning to play catch, you never walk over and kick them. Give yourself the same grace. The key is to be DELIBERATE and CONSISTENT and PATIENT.

It works, I promise.

## **STEP TWO**

I know I'm taking the verses out of order, but this is the order I teach them in. And I encourage you to not even read any further with this until you have at least begun retraining yourself with step one. For those of you that will anyway, please don't begin both at the same time. I know from experience with counselees that we're better off seeing these as building blocks that must be stacked to work well.

Now we're still going to skip verses 4 and 5 because these will be a whole lot easier after you start getting a handle on living steps one and two. But verses 6 and 7 are next and they require a little historical context to get the most out of them.

Take your requests to the lord with prayer. OK, that's easy. But supplication? For hundreds of years before and after this was written, everyone understood that they couldn't just walk in and talk to their local leader whether it was their king or a governor for an occupying force. Even in the book of Esther, she was nervous to go before the king on behalf of her people because anyone that entered the throne room without permission would be killed on the spot. But, there were periodic festivals where commoners could get in line and take their requests to the local leadership. Of course, the court room has plenty of armed guards ready to take your head if need be. This is all because you're just a commoner, even when allowed to enter the presence of the king, you are constantly reminded of your status compared to his. This humility,

this realizing that you're going before the God of the universe and you don't compare is supplication. Yes, humility. But there should be hope too! After all, you are also taking your request before the one that has the power to handle any request.

Lastly comes thanksgiving. In prayer, this is finding something to be thankful for, preferably related to your request. When I am praying for my wife before a surgery, I thank Him for all the years I've already had with her. I believe that part of the thanksgiving is that you are preparing your heart for Him.

The verse ends though with the promise that He will bring you peace that doesn't make sense. This is the reality of the Christian cliché, "Let go and let God." This is how to actually do it. How do I know it works? First, I believe that when there is a conditional promise (do this and He'll respond in a certain way) in the Bible that it is for us today too. Secondly, I know it works, because I have used it a number of times.

### **Conclusion**

Compare your thoughts to the list and replace the ones that don't make the cut. Do it over and over even if it feels like it's a constant battle. It will get easier. And consciously enter the presence of God remembering that He's God and you aren't! Then thank Him for something related to your request.

You may not beat all of your anxiety, that's why professionals like myself exist. Sometimes a little help is required and there should be no shame in that. But if you are serious about making these two steps part of your life, it will make a difference.

## Resources

1. <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/products/databriefs/db380.htm#:~:text=In%202019%2C%2019.2%25%20of%20U.S.,from%20a%20mental%20health%20professional.>
2. Scripture quotations taken from the NASB (New American Standard Bible) Copyright 1971, 1995