

Divine Provision *for* Anxiety



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 3:6–10; 15:1–3; John 14:1, 2; Matt. 6:25–34; 18:3; Phil. 4:11, 12.*

Memory Text: “Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you” (*1 Peter 5:7, NIV*).

Scripture is filled with verses containing words such as *afraid*, *anxiety*, *anxious*, *fret*, *frightened*, and *terrified*. Many references have to do with what people are anxious and fearful about; others with the promises of divine reassurance to those who are fearful or anxious. The message “Do not be afraid” runs across Scripture with strength and persistence.

And why not? After all, fear and anxiety have been part of human existence since sin entered this earth. Anxiety, or fear about what *may happen*, is one of the most dangerous emotions for mental and physical health. A medieval legend tells of the traveler who one night met Fear and Plague on their way to London, where they expected to kill 10,000 people. The traveler asked Plague if he would do all the killing. “Oh no,” Plague answered. “I shall kill only a few hundred. My friend Fear will kill the rest.”

This week's lesson is about how, through divine power, we can have some relief from fear and anxiety. Trust in God and contentment are key factors in looking at the future with confidence.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 8.*

The First Fearful Experience

Read Genesis 3:6–10. It is difficult to relate to Adam and Eve’s first encounter with fear, because none of us can remember the first time we experienced this emotion. Developmental psychologists have confirmed that infants from early life face definite fears, mostly of going hungry and of sharp noises. Growing children and adolescents go through a variety of fears, as well: fear of animals, of darkness, of being alone; fear of school-related situations, separation from parents, fear of not growing up, or of being rejected by peers. Adults also are subject to common apprehensions associated with their particular life circumstances: fear of not finding a suitable life partner, of not finding the right job, of terrorist attacks, of contracting a chronic or fatal disease, of being assaulted, of dying, etc.

Ellen G. White says that after Adam ate the forbidden fruit, “the thought of his sin filled him with terror” and that the mild temperature of Eden chilled the guilty couple. They were left with “a sense of sin, a dread of the future, a nakedness of soul.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 57.

Consider the following sample of promises against fear and anxiety. Identify the distinctive component of each of them.

Ps. 23:4 _____

Prov. 1:33 _____

Hag. 2:5 _____

1 Pet. 3:14 _____

1 John 4:18, 19 _____

Fear and anxiety are very common. They also are frequent, destructive, and painful. Common anxiety symptoms include apprehension, worry, insomnia, jitters, tension, headaches, fatigue, dizziness, palpitations, breathlessness, sweating, difficulty in concentrating, and hypervigilance. Anxiety also may come with panic attacks. God is interested in freeing us from such undesirable experiences and invites us to trust in Him.

What things make you especially afraid, and why? How rational is your fear? What practical steps can you take either to remove the thing that makes you afraid or to alleviate the fear itself?

Do Not Be Afraid

Read Genesis 15:1–3. What was Abram’s source of fear? What valid reasons did he have to fear?

God called Abram and promised to make him into a great nation. Seeing that years passed by and he had no heir, Abram dwelt on this issue, and it became his favorite worry. Verses 2 and 3 (*NIV*) reveal the core of Abram’s fear: “ ‘Who will inherit my estate? . . . A servant in my household will be my heir!’ ” The attitude seems a generalized reaction inherent to human nature, which is to perpetuate something of ourselves, something to carry on our influence even after we die.

God’s response to Abram’s concerns was, “ ‘Do not be afraid. . . . I am your shield, your very great reward’ ” (*Gen. 15:1, NIV*). The future of our lives, and our future, even after our death, is in the hands of our heavenly Father. He knows that freedom from anxiety is one of our greatest needs, and He wants us to be content today and confident about tomorrow.

Look up the following texts. What were the circumstances into which the Lord’s reassuring message “ ‘Do not be afraid’ ” (*NIV*) is introduced?

Deut. 31:8 _____

2 *Chron. 20:17* _____

Luke 21:9 _____

John 14:27 _____

Anxiety is manifested through distress about uncertainties. Such uncertainties may be near or far in the future, and they may not even happen; for the time being, they exist only in the mind. Yet, the symptoms of anxiety are quite real, both emotionally and physically, and can be painful. No wonder the Lord wishes to free us from them.

How can you best use God’s assurance—“Do not fear”—in whatever situation you are in? How can you remember that no matter what you are facing, God is stronger and bigger than that challenge and that He loves you with a love greater than the fears you have?

Trust Against Anxiety

Reflect on the comforting words of Jesus to His disciples in John 14:1, 2. What happened immediately before? Where does He direct their thoughts?

These loving words encourage trust. Trust in the Father, trust in Jesus, because this is a trust that can free the troubled heart from gazing at the future in distress. Jesus immediately takes the disciples' attention to the kingdom that He is preparing for them. In other words, no matter what happens to you here, no matter how bad things are, this is what you have waiting for you. Thus, trust in Me and My promises. This is what Jesus said to them then and is saying to us now.

In some counseling sessions clients act out roles relevant to real-life situations that lead to increased self-confidence and enhanced self-esteem. In addition, they learn how to manage their thoughts when anxiety is near, so that the mind may be focused on safe themes. They also are taught relaxation and breathing techniques to be used in critical situations.

Although those strategies enjoy a relatively high level of success, they focus on gaining trust in oneself in order to reduce the chances of feeling anxious. This is acceptable but incomplete, because trust in ourselves is but a small step. We need, in the end, to learn to trust in God.

How does the psalmist compare trust in God with trust in humanity?

Ps. 118:8, 9.

What is Jesus saying to us in Matthew 18:3?

The first task of infants is to develop trust in their mother or caregiver. Once this has been accomplished, little ones will feel content and confident about the world and the future that awaits them. This is the beginning of trust. Jesus asked us to relate to Him as a child relates to his or her mother, allowing ourselves to be soothed and comforted by His tender care. We, though, have to make a conscious choice to do just that.

Spend a few moments remembering the times when God has answered your prayers or provided the best for you. How can previous experiences such as these help you to enhance your trust in your heavenly Father today for whatever difficult situation you are facing and for whatever is making you feel anxious and worried?

Of Birds and Lilies

Aside from Jesus' kind advice to avoid worry, what lessons can we obtain from this segment of the Sermon on the Mount? *Matt. 6:25–33*.

Through this powerful text Jesus teaches a number of principles that, if seriously followed, can protect the believer from much distress.

Keep things in perspective (vs. 25). A hectic schedule may make us lose sight of the truly important things. Daily routines may distract us from what we believe to be fundamental. God gave us life. God created our bodies. If He has the power and the willingness to do that, will He not provide food to maintain His creation? Will He not arrange for the necessary garments to dress our bodies?

Become inspired by simple things from nature (vss. 26, 28–30). Sparrows and lilies are among the most common things in nature. Jesus chose them as a contrast to the immense complexity of human beings. It is obvious that sparrows do not worry about tomorrow and that lilies do not toil to obtain the latest fashion; yet, they are well taken care of. “‘Will he not much more clothe you?’ ” (vs. 30, *NIV*).

Worry is useless and pointless (vs. 27). Examining problems in order to find possible solutions may be productive, but worrying for the sake of worrying not only does nothing to solve the issue but magnifies the negative side of things.

Straighten out your priorities (vs. 33). Christians sometimes may be caught in the whirl of materialism or other things that can distract them from what really matters in life. Thus, Jesus reminds them: “‘Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you’ ” (*NKJV*).

Winston Churchill said: “I remember the story of the old man who said on his deathbed that he had a lot of trouble in his life, most of which had never happened.”—http://www.saidwhat.co.uk/quotes/political/winston_churchill.

Take a look at the things that worry you, and then kneel down and pray, asking God to take charge of all your worries. What are the concerns that you can have a part in fixing? What things are absolutely beyond your control? Do what you can to fix what you can, and then ask the Lord to help you learn to trust in Him for the rest.

One Day at a Time

Read Matthew 6:34. What is Jesus telling us here? How can we learn to do what He says? Why is it so important?

Putting into practice the message of Matthew 6:34 would bring so much peace to people today. Jesus is not asking us to ignore planning or to be careless. He simply is telling us not to worry about what may happen, not to use the typical “What if” thoughts: “What if I get sick?” “What if I lose my job?” “What if I have an accident?” “What if my child dies?” “What if someone attacks me?”

The following list shows the various things that make up an average person’s anxiety. Anxious individuals focus on:

1. Fifty percent of events that will never happen
2. Twenty-five percent of occurrences of the past that cannot be changed
3. Ten percent about unconfirmed criticism by others
4. Ten percent about health (much of it apprehensive)
5. Five percent about real problems that will be faced

How can you gain inspiration from Paul’s experience of contentment? *Phil. 4:11, 12.*

One of the keys for living one day at a time is contentment, an effective antidote for worry. Contentment is not an inheritable attitude but an acquired characteristic. Paul said that “I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation” (*vs. 12, NIV*). In this day and age, in which we face so many problems, there is a need to develop a sense of contentment for what we presently have and not to worry about what might come tomorrow.

Jesus said: “ ‘Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid’ ” (*John 14:27, NIV*). In practical terms, how do you benefit from Jesus’ assurance of peace of mind? Share your answer in class on Sabbath. What can you learn from each other?

Further Study: “It is not work that kills; it is worry. The only way to avoid worry is to take every trouble to Christ. Let us not look on the dark side. Let us cultivate cheerfulness of spirit.”—Ellen G. White, *Mind, Character, and Personality*, p. 466.

“If we educated our souls to have more faith, more love, greater patience, a more perfect trust in our heavenly Father, we would have more peace and happiness as we pass through the conflicts of this life. The Lord is not pleased to have us fret and worry ourselves out of the arms of Jesus. He is the only source of every grace, the fulfillment of every promise, the realization of every blessing. . . . Our pilgrimage would indeed be lonely were it not for Jesus. ‘I will not leave you comfortless’ (John 14:18), He says to us. Let us cherish His words, believe His promises, repeat them by day and meditate upon them in the night season, and be happy.”—Ellen G. White, *Mind, Character, and Personality*, p. 468.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ As a class, go over your answer to Thursday’s final question.
- ❷ Some, without any real immediate reason for concern, are afraid to suffer and die; others actually are experiencing a debilitating or terminal disease that will likely kill them. Others perhaps truly are facing another life-threatening situation. How can people in those circumstances be comforted?
- ❸ Jacob showed “great fear and distress” (*Gen. 32:7, NIV*) in preparing to meet Esau. Joseph’s brothers were “terrified” (*Gen. 45:3, NIV*) when Joseph revealed his true identity. Discuss acceptable ways to deal with fears that come from our own wrongdoing. Is there a difference in dealing with fears that we have brought upon ourselves through our own wrong actions? If so, what is the difference?
- ❹ Job affirmed: “What I feared has come upon me; what I dreaded has happened to me” (*Job 3:25, NIV*). Can our fears become real by the “self-fulfilling prophecy” effect? In other words, can a constant worry about something happening actually help bring about the thing feared? Discuss.
- ❺ Think about all the things you have worried about that never came to pass. What lessons can you learn from these experiences that should, ideally, help you worry less about the future now?

A Simple Invitation

by NEDYALKA ANGELOVA

Nedy listened patiently as her neighbor talked about a Bible study class she attended. Nedy is a science teacher in Bulgaria. She had tried several times to read the Bible, but even though she had a keen analytical mind, she couldn't understand it. So when her friend invited her to attend the Bible study class, she accepted. "I wanted to broaden my knowledge," she said. "I wasn't looking for God."

Nedy went to the Bible class prepared to take notes. But as the speaker lectured, she was struck by the profound lessons this man drew from the Bible. She continued attending the class and soaked up God's love. She told her husband, Nikolai, a retired military officer, what she was learning. But he responded, "You may go if you want, but don't bother me with religion."

Nedy knew that Nikolai wanted nothing to do with religion, but she continued to share with him what she was learning. Nedy's interest in the Bible grew, and she accepted her friend's invitation to attend the Sabbath worship services.

When the church organized a health expo, Nedy invited Nikolai to go with her, but he made no promises. So she was surprised to see him there. She learned that a friend also had invited him to attend, and he had agreed to go. The expo and the church members who sponsored it impressed Nikolai, and the following week he surprised Nedy by saying, "I want to go to church with you this week."

Nikolai stopped drinking and smoking and started attending church regularly. As their faith in God grew, they decided to be baptized together. "I never dreamed that a simple invitation to a Bible study class would change our lives so completely," Nedy says. "We're so much happier now than we were before we met Christ. I thank God for the faithful Adventists who invited us and who introduced us to God."



Our mission offerings help fund health expos and many other outreach programs that reach people for Christ around the world. Thank you for giving.

NEDYALKA and NIKOLAI ANGELOV (left) live in Yambol, Bulgaria.