

What Are You Afraid Of? 3¹
“I’m not worried! He’s got my back.”
Psalms 23

A Psalm of David.

The man who has traveled the bumpy road of trust (cf. Psalm 55 & 3)

Who’s got your back?

¹ The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

***The revelation of God’s personal name reveals
who He is: Exodus 2:23-3:15***

And He’s very interested in us: Psalm 139

*Perhaps the most important thing for a person to know
is that we’re known.*

**If we follow his lead
we’ll walk in the pathway of life.**

² He makes me lie down in green pastures. (*nourishment*)

He leads me beside still waters. (*lit. “waters of rest” peace*)

³ He restores my soul. (*renewal, psm 19:7*)

He leads me in paths of righteousness
for his name’s sake. (*psm 143:10*)

**He walks with us, even in the darkest
most dangerous pathways.**

⁴ Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,

I will fear no evil,

for you are with me;

your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

¹ O Lord, you have searched me and known me! ² You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. ³ You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. ⁴ Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O Lord, you know it altogether. ⁵ You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me.

¹⁷ How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! If I would count them, they are more than the sand. **Psalm 139:1-6,17-18a**

Don’t ever lose sight of the fact that we are headed for a happy ending.

⁵ You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;

you anoint my head with oil;

my cup overflows.

⁶ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

¹ Message prepared and shared with the congregation of West Salem Baptist Church by Dr. Paul Null, Sunday, July 28, 2019. Scripture citations are from the English Standard Version of the Bible.

Anxiety ain't fun. Chances are that you or someone you know seriously struggles with anxiety. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, anxiety disorders are reaching epidemic proportions. In a given year nearly fifty million Americans will feel the effects of a panic attack, phobias, or other anxiety disorders. Our chests will tighten. We'll feel dizzy and light-headed. We'll fear crowds and avoid people. Anxiety disorders in the United States are the "number one mental health problem among . . . women and are second only to alcohol and drug abuse among men."²

"The United States is now the most anxious nation in the world."³ (Congratulations to us!) The land of the Stars and Stripes has become the country of stress and strife. This is a costly achievement. "Stress-related ailments cost the nation \$300 billion every year in medical bills and lost productivity, while our usage of sedative drugs keeps skyrocketing; just between 1997 and 2004, Americans more than doubled their spending on anti-anxiety medications like Xanax and Valium, from \$900 million to \$2.1 billion." The Journal of the American Medical Association cited a study that indicates an exponential increase in depression. People of each generation in the twentieth century "were three times more likely to experience depression" than people of the preceding generation.

How can this be? Our cars are safer than ever. We regulate food and water and electricity. Though gangs still prowl our streets, most Americans do not live under the danger of imminent attack. Yet if worry were an Olympic event, we'd win the gold medal!

Citizens in other countries ironically enjoy more tranquility. They experience one-fifth the anxiety levels of Americans, despite having fewer of the basic life necessities. "What's more, when these less-anxious developing-world citizens immigrate to the United States, they tend to get just as anxious as Americans. Something about our particular way of life, then, is making us less calm and composed."

Our college kids are feeling it as well. In a study that involved more than two hundred thousand incoming freshmen, "students reported all-time lows in overall mental health and emotional stability." As psychologist Robert Leahy points out, "The average child today exhibits the same level of anxiety as the average psychiatric patient in the 1950s." Kids have more toys, clothes, and opportunities than ever, but by the time they leave home, they are wrapped tighter than Egyptian mummies. **We are tense.**

(Lucado, Max. Less Fret, More Faith (p. ix-xi). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition)

In some ways, anxiety is a learned habit that, through repeated flesh-forming activities (e.g., engaging in "what if?" thinking about the future and exaggerating what might happen if the "what if?" actually happens), forms grooves in the brain, heart muscle, and nervous system that trigger uncontrollable anxiety. In neuroscience, the saying is, "Neurons that fire together wire together." In other words, repeated anxious thoughts, feelings, and actions cause certain neurons to fire together, and this repetition causes certain neurons to wire together to form ingrained circuits. Like muscle memory, these circuits are habit-triggering grooves. These anxiety-inducing grooves can be significantly eliminated and replaced by grooves that change the brain's circuitry, which, in turn, automatically trigger emotions of peace and joy. This replacement requires, among other things (e.g., a sense of community), repeated practice of certain activities that will be explained later.²

PRACTICE DOESN'T MAKE PERFECT,

² Moreland, James Porter. Finding Quiet (pp. 43-44). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

BUT IT DOES MAKE PERMANENT