

QUESTION: I worry about many things in my life: my health, relationship, job. I find myself staring at the ceiling at night, struggling to sleep. In the morning, I am groggy and irritable. In addition, I race around, trying to finish chores and projects with little or no success. I feel like my head is in a vise. Help!

ANSWER: I can definitely relate to the way you are feeling. When I lost my job, I was full of fear about my future. During that time, I discovered this verse that helped me gain a better perspective: "Give thanks in all circumstances". Once I realized that I was not the only one in control, I had to let go and trust that answers would come. We know in our hearts that we cannot "add one single cubit to our span of life" by worrying, yet we all have times when we let the worry cycle take over. Perhaps some of these ideas for unleashing its hold on us will help.

Anxiety or worry is an emotion which triggers us to fight or flight. It can make our heart race and our head pound. It can literally make us sick, our thinking scrambled, our actions erratic. Worry occurs when we inaccurately perceive a threat, or we feel we don't have the ability to cope. To calm ourselves, we literally have to switch from our primitive animal brain to a more rational perspective to change our thoughts and then realistically deal with our concerns. All of us worry, on the average, 55 minutes a day, yet experts report that when we have anxiety, we worry 310 minutes, or six times as much!

Probably one of our best resources is support from people who can help us with our struggles. Having that special sister-in-law, mom, best friend, husband, etc., who always is there to listen, no matter what the problem, can lessen the tension we feel. “An anxious heart weighs a man down, but a kind word cheers him up,” writes King Solomon in Proverbs.

Challenging our negative thoughts is the second step in reducing worries. If we are fearful of losing our jobs in this sagging economy, is this thought realistic? We have skills essential to our company’s growth. However if we were unemployed, what other opportunities could add meaning to our life? Is it time to update our skills to benefit both my company and myself? Changing our tendency to look at situations in a negative light and examine all possibilities before panicking will be a start.

Then, we need to handle one task at a time, always asking, “What part of this problem is within my control?” This is our job for today: reading the want ads, updating our resumes, handling whatever is within our power, reducing our guilt about what is undone.

Most importantly, we must take very good of our physical bodies since long term tension will have negative effects on our bodies. We need to eat healthy meals, sleep well, and relax more. We can begin with our breathing, slowing our blood pressure down and calming our mind. Breathing deeply in through the nose and then slowly exhaling through the mouth will clear our frazzled brain. Then, one day at a time, we will savor the small joys of our lives: sipping tea while listening to classical music; visiting friends, never once thinking about what else we could be doing; watching twilight descend, noting each star and constellation, notice the smell of flowers, the aroma of a

home-cooked meal, and the gentle touch of a loved one. In addition, we can start to exercise daily- a walk or run, golf, tennis, yoga, etc. We can choose our activities wisely and enjoy the people in our lives

My anxiety lessened as I took better care of myself and reduced my worries about situations beyond my control. Hopefully these ideas will help you too. If your worry still overwhelms you, consider counseling or consult a physician to see if medication can help you enjoy each day again, no longer imprisoned by fear.

**Questions may be sent to the Samaritan Counseling Center, 302 Cedar, Niles, MI 49120, faxed to (269) 926-6780 or emailed to [pbambrick@samcounseling.org](mailto:pbambrick@samcounseling.org). Diane Kopp, a therapist at the Center, answered today's question.**

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