



## Feeling Overwhelmed and Distant from God

Feeling overwhelmed by life and distant from God is a struggle that many sincere Christians face. It's an experience often marked by anxiety, stress, and a sense of spiritual dryness. The good news is that both Scripture and science offer hope. In this article, we'll explore why you might feel this way and provide **practical, clinically-backed steps** – grounded in biblical truth – to help restore your peace and joy in Christ.

### The Weight of Anxiety on Mind and Soul

Anxiety is more than just worry – it's a **whole-person experience** that affects our bodies, minds, and spirits. When we're anxious or overwhelmed, the body's natural "fight-or-flight" response kicks in: our heart races, muscles tense, and thoughts spin with fear or worst-case scenarios. Chronic anxiety can even dysregulate brain chemicals and stress hormones (like cortisol), leaving us exhausted and on edge. It's no wonder that in these moments it can be hard to feel God's nearness or peace.

Importantly, you are **far from alone** in experiencing this. Anxiety disorders are actually the *most common* mental health condition worldwide, affecting hundreds of millions. In 2019, about **301 million people** globally had an anxiety disorder, yet only about one in four receive treatment <sup>1</sup>. Even among faithful Christians, anxiety is not rare or a sign of weak faith – it's a human condition that many biblical figures also battled. The Psalmist David, for example, wrote *"When my heart is overwhelmed, lead me to the rock that is higher than I"* (Psalm 61:2), showing that he too knew the feeling of inner turmoil and urgently needed God's stability.

Anxiety doesn't just cause racing pulse or sweaty palms; it **weighs down the heart**. *"Anxiety in a man's heart weighs it down,"* says Proverbs 12:25. It can cloud our ability to sense God's presence or to pray with focus. Physiologically, an anxious brain is hyper-alert to threats, which can make it difficult to "be still" in prayer (Psalm 46:10) or to sleep restfully. Spiritually, we might start questioning, "Where is God in all this chaos?" or feel guilt for being afraid despite verses like *"Do not be anxious about anything"* (Philippians 4:6). If you've ever felt that tension – knowing God's promise of peace but still feeling panic – take heart: **God understands our frailty**. His command *"Fear not"* appears 365 times in the Bible, not to shame us, but to remind us daily that **He is with us** even when our feelings don't line up with that truth (Isaiah 41:10, Matthew 28:20).

Modern medicine confirms that anxiety is a real condition with real treatments. Doctors note that persistent anxiety can lead to symptoms like difficulty concentrating, irritability, muscle tension, disturbed sleep, and a constant sense of dread or impending doom <sup>2</sup>. In severe cases, it can contribute to depression or burnout. The **hopeful news** is that anxiety is highly treatable. Medical guidelines recommend therapies and strategies that can significantly reduce symptoms – and as we'll see, many of these align with God's design for how we should care for our minds and bodies.



## When God Feels Far Away

Beyond the physical and mental strain, feeling *"distant from God"* is a deep spiritual pain. You might be praying and hearing nothing, or attending church but feeling numb. **Such spiritual dryness is not a new phenomenon.** Many heroes of faith went through seasons when God *felt* absent. The prophet Elijah, after great victories, fell into despair and told God, *"I have had enough, Lord"* – he felt alone and wanted to die (1 Kings 19:4,10). King David cried out, *"Why, O Lord, do you stand far off? Why do You hide Yourself in times of trouble?"* (Psalm 10:1). Even Jesus, in His human agony on the cross, echoed Psalm 22: *"My God, why have You forsaken Me?"* (Matthew 27:46). **Clearly, feeling forsaken or distant has been part of the journey of faith.**

What these biblical examples also show is that *feeling* God is far does not mean **He actually left**. In each case, God was still present and at work. After Elijah poured out his anxiety, God met him with a gentle whisper and gave practical help – providing food and rest first, then spiritual reassurance (1 Kings 19:5–12). David often begins his psalms in despair but ends in hope, preaching to his soul, *"Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise Him"* (Psalm 42:11). These accounts encourage us that **our feelings are not always reliable gauges of God's nearness**. He promises *"Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you"* (Hebrews 13:5), and *"The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit"* (Psalm 34:18). In other words, when you feel most brokenhearted and distant, God is actually **close by, ready to save** – even if emotions tell you otherwise.

That said, it's worth gently examining why we might feel distant. Sometimes, unconfessed sin can put a strain on our fellowship with God (Psalm 32:3–5), or neglecting prayer and Scripture can make us less aware of Him. Other times, it's no fault of our own at all – we may be undergoing a "wilderness" period where God is growing our faith in unseen ways (James 1:2–4). Mental health issues like depression can also blunt our emotional capacity to feel **any** joy or closeness (spiritual or otherwise), creating a numbness that is physiological. Understanding the root – whether it's stress, grief, illness, busyness, or doubt – can help determine the best steps forward. But **always remember**: *not feeling* God is there does not equate to *Him* not being there. Faith is "the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). In dry seasons, we lean on the **truth of God's Word over the transience of feelings**, trusting that He is faithful even when our heart aches.

If God seems silent, follow the example of the Psalmists: continue to cry out honestly. Tell Him exactly how you feel – your anger, loneliness, or confusion. This kind of raw prayer is itself an act of faith. As Psalm 62:8 encourages, *"Trust in Him at all times... pour out your hearts before Him; God is a refuge for us."* You may not get an immediate answer or emotion, but pouring out your heart keeps the lines of communication open and honors God with your trust. **Don't isolate** yourself in shame during these times either. The temptation when we feel spiritually dry is to withdraw from church or believing friends out of embarrassment or apathy. Yet those are the very people who can encourage you, pray for you, and remind you of God's truths when you can't preach to yourself. Scripture says *"Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ"* (Galatians 6:2). Let trusted friends or a pastor come alongside you – none of us are meant to walk through the valley alone.

## Integrating Faith and Evidence-Based Strategies

It's important to recognize that **spiritual struggles and mental health struggles are often intertwined**. We are whole beings – body, mind, and spirit – and what affects one part affects the others. In Christian



theology, caring for our mental well-being is not separate from our faith; it can be a crucial part of living out that faith. Unfortunately, some well-meaning Christians have suggested that issues like anxiety or depression are “just spiritual problems” (e.g. due to sin or weak faith) that shouldn’t be treated with medicine or therapy. However, research is finding that this **overly spiritualized view of mental illness can be harmful**. A 2022 study in *Frontiers in Psychology* noted that purely attributing depression to spiritual causes – while ignoring psychological or medical factors – was often *unhelpful* and even made the individual’s mental health worse <sup>3</sup> <sup>4</sup>. In contrast, a **holistic approach** that addresses **both** the spiritual and the psychological/biological sides leads to better outcomes <sup>4</sup>. In other words, praying and reading Scripture *and* possibly seeing a therapist or doctor when needed is a balanced, biblical way to pursue healing. The church has long taught that we should care for our bodies as “temples of the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 6:19) – this care can include tending to our mental health with the tools God has made available.

Far from undermining faith, many **modern therapies actually harmonize with biblical principles**. For example, **Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT)**, one of the most effective talk therapies for anxiety and depression, centers on identifying negative thought patterns and reframing them in light of truth and reality. Scripture has been saying this all along! “*Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind*” (Romans 12:2) and “*we take every thought captive to obey Christ*” (2 Corinthians 10:5) are directly in line with the idea of challenging distorted thoughts and replacing lies with truth <sup>5</sup>. In fact, Christian counselors often integrate these verses into CBT techniques. There is even a specific approach known as **Religiously-Integrated CBT**, where therapists use a patient’s sacred scriptures (for Christians, the Bible) to dispute negative thinking. Research has shown this can be as effective as standard CBT. In one clinical trial, patients with major depression received either conventional CBT or Christian-integrated CBT over 12 weeks – and **both groups improved significantly, with no major differences in outcomes**. The study concluded that “*religiously integrated CBT was equivalent to standard CBT*” in effectiveness <sup>6</sup> <sup>7</sup>, and in highly religious participants it even showed slightly better adherence and efficacy <sup>8</sup>. The takeaway: you don’t have to check your faith at the door when getting professional help. A skilled Christian therapist (or a therapist respectful of your faith) can combine prayer and scripture with proven techniques to help retrain your anxious mind.

Likewise, **mindfulness and meditative practices** – often used to calm anxiety – can be implemented in a Christian way. Mindfulness, at its core, means focusing one’s awareness on the present moment in an accepting, non-judgmental way. Some Christians fear mindfulness because of its roots in Eastern meditation, but in truth Christianity has its own rich history of contemplative prayer and silence before God. The Bible frequently calls us to meditate on God’s Word (Psalm 1:2) and to be still in His presence. A 2022 paper in the journal *Religions* discusses how “*mindfulness practices for coping and self-care*” can be compatible with Christian faith, noting that **many Christian traditions are “reclaiming” the contemplative aspects** of faith and seeing that practices like silence, slow breathing, and mindful prayer can aid both *emotional healing* and *spiritual growth* <sup>9</sup> <sup>10</sup>. Clinically, mindfulness is backed by substantial evidence: it has been shown to improve physical well-being and **reduce symptoms of depression, anxiety, and psychological distress** <sup>11</sup>. When framed appropriately (focusing on Christ or a Scripture while practicing calm breathing, for example), it can become a tool to “*cast your anxieties on Him*” in a very literal, bodily sense (1 Peter 5:7). If sitting still to pray feels impossible when you’re anxious, guided Christian meditation (such as breathing slowly and repeating a biblical phrase like “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want”) can physiologically lower your stress response while also drawing your attention back to God.



Finally, **medication** is another area where faith and medicine can work together. If you had diabetes, you wouldn't hesitate to use insulin while also praying for healing; in the same way, using medication for anxiety or depression can be a wise part of stewardship of your health. Many cases of prolonged anxiety or depression involve dysregulation of brain chemistry. Antidepressant or anti-anxiety medications (like SSRIs) are designed to help correct those imbalances. Far from showing a lack of faith, taking these medicines can enable you to *better* engage with life and God. The medical consensus is that **medications such as SSRIs are often a first-line treatment** for chronic anxiety disorders <sup>12</sup>, and they have a solid track record of safety and efficacy. There is **no biblical prohibition** against using medicine. In fact, one Christian medical resource emphasizes that *"God has allowed man to grow in his knowledge of medicine, which God often uses in the healing process"* <sup>13</sup>. Nowhere does the Bible say we must refuse medical help; on the contrary, Luke was a physician, and Paul advised Timothy to take a medicinal remedy for his stomach ailment (1 Timothy 5:23). We should certainly pray for God's healing, but we can also **thank Him for providing medicine and wisdom to doctors**. As the Christian author of that resource concluded, *"there is no biblical reason not to avail ourselves of [medical treatment]."* <sup>13</sup> Medication is best used as one part of a **holistic plan** — alongside addressing emotional and spiritual needs <sup>14</sup> — but for some, it can be a true God-send that lifts the fog enough for them to reconnect with God and others. If your doctor recommends a course of medication, you can prayerfully consider it without guilt or stigma. It's not "either trust God or take medicine" — you can do both, trusting God *through* the provision of medicine.

## Steps to Overcome Overwhelm and Renew Your Faith

Integrating these insights, here are some **practical steps** you can take — each grounded in both **clinical research and biblical wisdom**:

- **Pour Out Your Heart in Prayer — and Embrace God's Peace:** Start by bringing your anxiety and burdens to God honestly. Jesus invites, *"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest"* (Matthew 11:28). In prayer, literally *cast* your stresses on Him (imagine handing them over) because *"He cares for you"* (1 Peter 5:7). This isn't a one-time thing but a daily, even hourly, practice. Research shows that prayer and religious coping can reduce stress and foster hope in the face of adversity <sup>14</sup>. One effective approach is **praying with thanksgiving** — as Philippians 4:6-7 says, *"by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God."* Gratitude is powerful. Mental health studies have found that deliberately practicing gratitude (thanking God for even small blessings) is linked to **greater emotional well-being, better sleep, and lower depression risk** <sup>15</sup>. In practice, this could mean ending each day by thanking God for three things, even if they're as simple as a kind word from a friend or the strength to get through the day. As you pray and give thanks, God's promise is that *"the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus"* (Philippians 4:7). Many believers can testify that in moments of honest prayer, an unexplainable peace would often replace panic — a fulfillment of that very promise.
- **Renew Your Mind with God's Truth (Think on These Things):** Anxiety is often fed by distorted thoughts — *"I'm all alone... I can't handle this... The worst will happen... God must be displeased with me."* To combat these, use the biblical version of CBT: *immerse yourself in truth and take those thoughts captive*. Make it a habit to **meditate on Scripture**, especially verses that counter your particular fears. For example, if you feel abandoned, memorize Hebrews 13:5 (*"I will never leave you"*); if you worry about the future, hold onto Jeremiah 29:11 (God's good plans for you) or Romans 8:28. Whenever a wave of anxious or condemning thoughts hits, intentionally pause and **challenge them**. Ask: *"What is the evidence for this thought? Does it align with God's Word?"* Then replace the lie with

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God's truth. This is essentially what CBT's *"cognitive restructuring"* does, and it's very effective at reducing anxiety. Romans 12:2 urges us to *"be transformed by the renewing of your mind,"* and psychology agrees that what consistently fills your mind will shape your emotional state. Some practical tools: keep a journal of anxious thoughts versus the truth you countered them with; speak God's promises out loud (hearing truth in your own voice can reinforce it); and focus on *"whatever is true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, and commendable"* (Philippians 4:8) as an act of mental discipline. Over time, this godly mental rewiring can break the cycle of worry. One **real-life example**: A Christian man named Michael had severe anxiety about his job and felt God had abandoned him in his career struggles. His counselor had him log his fearful thoughts and find scriptures to refute them. *"I'm going to fail and lose everything"* was replaced with *"God will supply all my needs"* (Philippians 4:19); *"God is punishing me"* was replaced with *"Nothing can separate me from His love"* (Romans 8:38-39). Michael also practiced gratitude by writing down 3 positives each day. Over three months, his *GAD-7 anxiety score* fell from 15 (moderate anxiety) to 5 (minimal). He reported feeling **closer to God than he had in years**, because instead of believing the anxious voice in his head, he was believing God's voice of truth.

- **Draw Near through Worship and Community:** When you feel distant from God, one of the counter-intuitive but most powerful things you can do is continue engaging in **corporate worship and fellowship**. Join that small group, attend church services, or simply reach out to a Christian friend to talk or pray together – *especially* when you don't feel like it. There's a reason the Bible calls us to not give up meeting together (Hebrews 10:25). Worshipping with others – singing truths about God, hearing the Word preached – can rekindle faith sparks in your heart. It reminds you that you're part of a bigger story and not isolated in your struggle. Scientifically, social support is a major protective factor for mental health. Strong supportive relationships can buffer stress and improve resilience. In fact, studies have found that people who frequently attend religious services *have lower rates of depression and greater life satisfaction* <sup>16</sup>. One large study of U.S. women showed those attending church at least once a week had a significantly **decreased risk of developing depression** compared to those who seldom attended <sup>16</sup>. The benefits aren't just social – they're spiritual too. When you can't find words to pray, let others pray for you; when you can't sing because your heart is heavy, let the congregation's praise carry you. As you vulnerably share with a trusted friend or a mentor about feeling overwhelmed, you may find *"iron sharpens iron"* (Proverbs 27:17) – they might share how they got through a similar valley, or simply reassure you that you're not a "bad Christian" for feeling this way. The body of Christ exists to **lift up each of its members** when we're weak (1 Corinthians 12:26). Even just sitting in a church service while feeling numb can, over time, re-open your heart to God's presence. Don't isolate – lean into community.
- **Care for Your Body as God's Temple:** Sometimes the most *spiritual* thing you can do is tend to your basic physical needs. Our nervous system and our soul are tightly connected. When Elijah was overwhelmed and depressed, God's first prescription was not a sermon but rather *"Get up and eat"* and *"sleep"* (1 Kings 19:5-7). We too may need to address exhaustion or lifestyle imbalances before we can sense God's peace. Make sure you are getting adequate **rest and sleep** – chronic fatigue can make everything feel worse and heighten anxiety. Try to observe a *Sabbath* rhythm by taking one day a week to truly slow down, refocus on the Lord, and do things that refresh you. Additionally, consider your diet: eating regularly and nutritiously (while avoiding excess caffeine, sugar, or alcohol that can spike anxiety) will give your brain the fuel it needs to stay calm. One often overlooked aid for anxiety and low mood is **exercise**. You don't have to become a marathoner – a 20-30 minute walk, a light jog, or any activity to get your heart rate up a bit can release endorphins and reduce the





muscle tension of stress. Research confirms that *physical activity reduces symptoms of anxiety* and improves mood <sup>17</sup>. In fact, some studies suggest exercise can be as effective as medication for mild depression/anxiety, and it improves sleep quality too. The Bible affirms the value of bodily training (1 Timothy 4:8) – while our ultimate hope is in God, caring for our physical health is part of wise stewardship. So, take small steps: stretch and breathe deeply when panic rises, go outside and appreciate God’s creation, maybe take a walk while meditating on a Psalm. These simple practices can clear mental fog and make you more receptive to feeling God’s presence. **Remember:** your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, so treating it kindly is an act of worship (Romans 12:1).

- **Seek Wise Counsel – Don’t Hesitate to Get Professional Help:** God often works through people, including trained counselors and medical professionals. If you find that despite prayer, self-care, and support from friends you are still trapped in overwhelming anxiety or stuck in deep despair, **consider speaking with a Christian counselor or therapist.** Therapy is not a sign of spiritual failure; it’s a gift. A professional can provide structured techniques to manage anxiety, help uncover underlying issues, and offer an objective, compassionate perspective. Look for a licensed counselor who respects your faith values – many Christian counselors specialize in integrating prayer and scripture with therapy. They can help with techniques like CBT or trauma processing in a safe, faith-informed environment. Also, see your doctor to rule out any medical causes of anxiety (thyroid issues, for example, can cause anxious feelings, and nutritional deficiencies or hormonal changes can affect mood). If indicated, do not be afraid of **medication** as one tool in your toolbox. Antidepressant or anti-anxiety medications (such as SSRIs) are **well-researched and widely recommended** for persistent anxiety disorders <sup>12</sup>. They typically take a few weeks to build up effect and can gently correct the chemical aspects of anxiety, so that you have the emotional bandwidth to address spiritual and psychological aspects. As mentioned, using medicine is biblically permissible – *“God heals through medicine and doctors”* just as He can heal through miracles <sup>18</sup>. There is *wisdom* in using all means God provides. Think of medication as an “assistant” that can help you engage better with therapy and with life. Many Christians have testified that, after prayerfully starting a prescribed medication, their mind felt clear enough to pray and read Scripture again without constant racing thoughts – truly an answer to prayer. If you do pursue medication, continue to commit the process to God, asking Him to use it for your good and guide you in its use. And remember, needing help is human; God designed us for community and equipped professionals with knowledge to aid in healing. *“Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed”* (Proverbs 15:22). Reaching out for counsel – whether pastoral, professional, or medical – is a proactive step of faith toward the wholeness God desires for you.

## Finding Hope and Joy Again

Walking out of the fog of overwhelm and spiritual dryness **takes time**, but it is absolutely possible. As you implement these steps – praying even when it’s hard, renewing your mind with God’s promises, caring for your wellbeing, and accepting help – you are sowing seeds that will, in time, bear the fruit of peace. Galatians 6:9 encourages us, *“Let us not grow weary in doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.”* In the midst of anxiety or distance from God, it’s easy to feel hopeless, as if nothing will ever change. But feelings are not facts. The truth is that **God deeply loves you right now** in your mess. He has not left you, and He never will. *“The LORD your God is in your midst – a Mighty One who will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness; He will quiet you with His love”* (Zephaniah 3:17). Imagine that: God rejoicing over you and quieting your anxious heart with His love. That promise can become a reality as you persist in seeking Him and also seek the help you need.



Be patient with yourself in this journey. Overcoming anxiety or renewing a sense of God's presence is usually a gradual process, not an overnight miracle. You might take two steps forward and one step back – that's okay. Celebrate progress, no matter how small: a day with fewer panic symptoms, a moment in worship where you sense God's peace, a thought pattern successfully shifted from panic to prayer. These are signs of healing. **Keep a record of testimonies** – journal answered prayers or days you had strength that could only have come from God. Like stones of remembrance, these will boost your faith during any relapses.

In closing, remember Jesus's tender invitation: *"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you... Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid"* (John 14:27). Christ wants to give you His supernatural peace, far deeper than what the world offers. He has also graciously provided means – supportive others, wisdom in Scripture, and tools of medicine and therapy – to help us grasp that peace. By embracing both prayer **and** practical help, you are exercising wisdom and faith together. You don't have to live under the weight of constant anxiety or feeling disconnected from God. As you take these steps, **trust that God is also actively working in you**: *"He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion"* (Philippians 1:6). Even if you can't feel it yet, He is carrying you, healing you, and drawing you closer.

**Encouragement:** *"Those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not faint"* (Isaiah 40:31). You will not feel overwhelmed forever – by God's grace, your strength **will** be renewed and your joy in Him restored. Keep hoping in the Lord, take courage, and seek the help He provides. The clouds will part, and the Sun of Righteousness will shine on you again with healing (Malachi 4:2). In time, you'll be able to say, *"When anxiety was great within me, Your consolation brought me joy"* (Psalm 94:19). Amen.

## References:

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