



How to Stop a Panic Attack Using Breathing Exercises

Panic attacks can strike suddenly, overwhelming you with intense fear, a racing heartbeat, shortness of breath, and a sense of impending doom. If you've ever experienced one, you know how frightening it feels – and you're not alone. Every year, up to **11% of people** in the United States experience at least one panic attack ([Cleveland Clinic](#)). Even faithful Christians are not immune; biblical figures like King David described similar feelings: *"Fear and trembling have beset me; horror has overwhelmed me"* (Psalm 55:5, NIV). The good news is that there are practical tools, like breathing exercises, that can help stop a panic attack in its tracks. You can use these tools **in tandem with faith in God's promises**. This article will explain how to do that, integrating solid science with biblical wisdom to help you find peace and regain joy in Christ even in anxious moments.

Image: Focusing on steady inhales and exhales is a simple but powerful tool to quell panic. Long exhalations activate the body's calming response (parasympathetic nervous system), slowing the heart rate and reducing anxiety ([Stanford Medicine](#)).

What Happens During a Panic Attack?

A panic attack is essentially a **false alarm** in your body's fight-or-flight system. Suddenly, and often without warning, the brain triggers a surge of adrenaline that produces intense physical symptoms: your heart pounds, you start breathing rapidly (hyperventilating), you may sweat or shake, and you might feel dizzy or nauseated. It's common to feel like you're having a heart attack or "going crazy." Emotionally, you experience overwhelming terror or the conviction that something disastrous is imminent.

These episodes are **brief but intense**. Symptoms usually **peak within about 10 minutes** after onset and then begin to subside soon after ([Cleveland Clinic](#)). Most panic attacks last only 5 to 20 minutes, though it can feel much longer when you're in the middle of one. Knowing this can help – *the worst will be over in a matter of minutes*. As Scripture says, *"weeping may stay for the night, but rejoicing comes in the morning"* (Psalm 30:5, NIV); in a similar way, the wave of panic will pass. **Remember that it will pass**. During a panic attack, telling yourself that it is temporary (since most attacks peak and fade within minutes) can help you feel more in control. Experts note that acknowledging "this will be over soon" is a helpful coping thought to reduce the fear of the symptoms ([Medical News Today](#)). Some people find it useful to quietly repeat to themselves, "This will pass. I am going to be okay," as a way to ground their mind until the intensity lessens.

Importantly, a panic attack by itself **won't physically harm you**. The sensations are terrifying but not life-threatening – they are your body's response to a perceived threat that isn't truly dangerous. (In fact, the adrenaline rush is a God-given response meant to protect you from real danger, though in a panic attack it's a false alarm.) However, frequent panic attacks can take a toll on your quality of life and rob you of peace and joy if not addressed. The Bible acknowledges how heavy anxiety can feel: *"Anxiety weighs down the heart, but a kind word cheers it up"* (Proverbs 12:25, NIV). So first, take comfort in knowing **you are not alone or**



“weak” for experiencing this; many people of strong faith have felt the grip of fear. The key is learning how to respond in the moment and, over time, how to reduce their power over you.

The Body, Breath, and the Panic Response

When panic strikes, **your nervous system** is in overdrive. The sympathetic nervous system – responsible for the “fight or flight” reaction – has gone into high gear, pumping out stress hormones that speed up your heart and breathing. One of the hallmark symptoms is rapid, shallow breathing. Many people *hyperventilate* during a panic attack, meaning they breathe much faster than normal. This **over-breathing upsets the balance of oxygen and carbon dioxide in your blood**, which can cause lightheadedness, tingling in the fingers or lips, and even more feelings of panic. For example, **hyperventilation** (rapid breathing) causes a surplus of oxygen and a deficit of carbon dioxide in the blood. This imbalance alters your blood pH and can produce symptoms like lightheadedness, tingling, shortness of breath, and confusion ([UCLA Health](#)). It’s a vicious cycle: anxiety makes you breathe fast, and breathing fast makes you feel alarming symptoms, which in turn increase your fear. (This is why the old advice of breathing into a paper bag was sometimes given – rebreathing your exhaled air restores CO₂ levels – but a safer approach is simply to slow your breathing deliberately, as we’ll do with these exercises.)

Here is where the power of **breathing exercises** comes in. Breathing is special because it’s both automatic and under our control. According to Dr. David Spiegel, a psychiatry professor at Stanford, *“Most of the time breathing is automatic, like digestion, heartbeat and other bodily functions, but you can very easily take over and control your breath, which then affects your overall physiology and stress response”* ([Stanford Medicine](#)). In other words, by deliberately changing *how* you breathe, you can send new signals to your body and brain. By slowing and deepening your breaths, you activate the opposite side of your autonomic nervous system – the **parasympathetic nervous system**, often nicknamed the “rest and digest” system. In particular, **long, slow exhalations** are key to calming down. Exhaling very slowly triggers the vagus nerve and parasympathetic response, which *slows your heart rate* and, as Dr. Spiegel notes, has “an overall soothing effect on the body” ([Stanford Medicine](#)). Essentially, you’re tapping into the way God designed your body: the same system that revs you up can also calm you down, and your breath is the switch you can control.

Modern research confirms how effective controlled breathing can be for anxiety relief. For example, **Stanford Medicine researchers** found that just five minutes a day of a specific breathing exercise significantly reduced overall anxiety and improved mood in participants ([Stanford Medicine](#)). In that study, the controlled breathing groups actually showed greater improvements in positive feelings (calm, joy, etc.) compared to a mindfulness meditation group, suggesting breathwork can rapidly boost well-being ¹ ² . Other scientific studies indicate that **slow, deep breathing** directly counteracts the stress response. For instance, a 2025 study in *Scientific Reports* found that breathing around 4.5–6.5 breaths per minute (a very slow rate) optimally increases vagal (parasympathetic) activity, balancing the autonomic nervous system and reducing anxiety levels ([Scientific Reports 2025](#)). In simple terms: **slower breathing = a calmer body and mind**.

From a Christian perspective, it’s no surprise that **breath is life-giving** – after all, Genesis 2:7 says God formed man from the dust and *“breathed into his nostrils the breath of life.”* The Hebrew term for “breath” (*ruach*) also means “spirit” or “wind,” reminding us that our physical breath and our spiritual life are deeply connected in God’s design. We are integrated beings, body and spirit together. Thus, caring for our bodies in moments of anxiety – by breathing slowly, for instance – is not a “lack of faith” or a merely materialistic tactic; it’s part of wisely stewarding the physical temple God gave us (1 Corinthians 6:19-20) so

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that we can better focus our hearts on Him. Calming your body can help quiet your mind to hear God's voice. As one biblical counselor observed, *breathing techniques do accomplish something*, and using them "is not inherently wrong but can actually be helpful in reducing the physiological impact of anxiety" ([Biblical Counseling Coalition](#)). We just must remember that these techniques address the **symptoms** of anxiety, not the deeper **sources**. Breathing exercises can "take the edge off" the physical panic, enabling you to think more clearly – but as Christians we also want to address the root fears and thoughts through prayer, trust in God, and possibly counseling. (More on that later.) For now, let's focus on how to actually do these breathing exercises in a moment of panic.

Breathing Exercises to Stop a Panic Attack

When you feel a panic attack coming on (or find yourself in the middle of one), **the first thing to do is to consciously slow and deepen your breathing**. This simple act directly counteracts the hyperventilation and adrenaline rush. Here are some proven breathing techniques to try, and how you can incorporate them with prayer:

- **Deep Diaphragmatic Breathing (Belly Breathing):** *"Deep breathing, also known as diaphragmatic breathing, can benefit people with anxiety disorders and panic attacks,"* notes an article on *Medical News Today* ([Medical News Today](#)). The idea is to breathe using your diaphragm (the large muscle under your lungs) rather than shallowly from your chest. **How to do it:** Start by sitting comfortably. Relax your shoulders. Place one hand on your abdomen (around your navel) and one on your chest. Inhale slowly **through your nose** for a count of about 4, drawing the breath deep into your belly. You should feel your stomach expand under your hand (while the hand on your chest stays relatively still). That means you're filling your lungs fully. Then exhale gently **through your mouth** for a count of 4, letting the air out steadily (you can purse your lips slightly, as if blowing out a candle, to slow the exhale). Feel your abdominal hand move back inward as you empty your lungs. Continue this slow in-and-out pattern. Focus your thoughts on the sensation of the air flowing and your abdomen rising and falling. If you like, **add a prayer or biblical truth** to this rhythm (more on that below). Diaphragmatic breathing increases oxygen to your brain and helps correct the CO₂ imbalance from hyperventilation, which in turn reduces symptoms like dizziness. It also activates the vagus nerve to calm your heart rate. Many people notice that after even 4 or 5 belly-breaths, their pounding heart starts to settle and a sense of control returns.
- **4-7-8 Breathing:** This is a classic anti-anxiety breathing technique popularized by Dr. Andrew Weil. It creates a calming effect by prolonging the exhale and briefly holding the breath. **How to do it:** Breathe in quietly **through your nose** for a count of **4** seconds. Hold that breath for **7** seconds (if this feels too long at first, you can start with 4 or 5 seconds and work up to 7). Then exhale slowly **through your mouth** for **8** seconds, making a soft whooshing sound as the air comes out. (You can slightly constrict the back of your throat to control the exhale.) This 4-7-8 pattern roughly equates to one breath about every 19 seconds, which is very slow – it forces your body into a relaxed state. Repeat this cycle for 4 breaths or as many as you need. People often find their whole body unclenches after a few rounds. **Tip:** As you hold the 7 seconds, use that time to say a quick silent prayer or focus on a mental image of God's peace, then "blow out" your tension on the 8-second exhale. This technique can be done anywhere; many use it to fall asleep as well. It's a tangible way to *"be still before the Lord and wait patiently for Him"* (Psalm 37:7).



- **Box Breathing (4x4 method):** Used by everyone from Navy SEALs to athletes, box breathing is simple and highly effective for regaining calm. It's called "box" because each phase of the breath is equal in length, like the four sides of a square. **How to do it:** Inhale for a slow count of **4**. Hold your lungs full for **4**. Exhale for **4**. Then hold your lungs empty for **4** before the next inhale. (So the pattern is 4-4-4-4.) As you do this, it can help to visualize drawing a square in your mind – trace one side with the inhale, the next side with the hold, and so on. **How it helps:** Box breathing not only ensures you're breathing slowly, it also gives your anxious mind something to focus on (counting and the mental image of the square) other than the panic. It brings a sense of order and steadiness. You might even imagine the box as God's safe "framework" around you, keeping you secure. Take care not to rush the counts – the goal is a smooth, even rhythm. After a minute or two of box breathing, you may notice your heart rate has come down and your hands are less shaky. As a believer, you can quietly repeat a promise of Scripture in your mind during the 4-second holds – for example, when holding full, think "*God is with me*", and when holding empty, "*Be not afraid.*" There's nothing mystical about the box; it's simply a tool to regulate your God-given physiology. (One Christian counselor even mentioned that there's **nothing wrong** with teaching someone "box breathing" to alleviate anxiety's physical symptoms – we just recognize it's not a cure for the underlying worries by itself ([Biblical Counseling Coalition](#)). In practice, it can be a God-send to help you get through the peak moment.)
- **"Cyclic Sighing" (Prolonged Exhale):** This technique comes from recent research at Stanford and essentially involves making your exhales longer than your inhales – it's like a purposeful sigh. Dr. Spiegel and colleagues found this particularly effective for reducing anxiety and *increasing* positive mood ¹ ³. **How to do it:** Inhale through your nose until your lungs are comfortably full. Then *sip in a little more air* – a second inhale – to fully inflate your lungs. Now exhale **very slowly** through your mouth until all the air is gone. (It might take 6-8 seconds or more to exhale if you inhaled deeply.) That's one "cyclic sigh" breath. Often, after just one or two of these, you'll feel a noticeable release of tension – people naturally sigh as a reflex to relieve stress. To get the best results, continue this pattern for a few minutes. **Why it works:** Long exhalations stimulate the calming parasympathetic system (as mentioned earlier). In the Stanford study, doing this for about 5 minutes a day led to steadily lower resting breathing rates and increased daily calmness in participants. You can use cyclic sighing in the moment of panic (it's basically an exaggeration of the deep-slow breathing we've already described). It's especially useful if you catch the panic early – a couple of big sighing breaths might abort the attack entirely. Spiritually, as you *sigh out* the air, you might imagine you're also sighing out your distress and handing it over to God. "*Cast your cares on the Lord and He will sustain you*" (Psalm 55:22, NIV). Each exhale can be a physical act of casting that burden to Him.

Each of these exercises centers on the same principle: **take back control of your breath**. By doing so, you're effectively sending a signal to your body that it's okay to calm down. Think of it like gently applying the brakes on a car that's speeding downhill. Panic is the downhill rush; controlled breathing is the brake. In spiritual terms, it's a way of "*being still*" in the midst of chaos (Psalm 46:10).

Breathing + Prayer: Finding Calm for Body *and* Soul

Don't just breathe – **breathe and pray**. As a Christian, one of your greatest tools in anxiety is prayer and the truth of God's Word. You can combine this with breathing for a doubly powerful effect, addressing both your physical state and your spiritual state.



One practical method is often called a **“breath prayer.”** This is simply pairing a short biblical prayer or phrase with your breathing rhythm. It’s an ancient Christian practice to pray in time with one’s breath, and it can be a beautiful way to refocus on God’s presence. Here’s how you can do it during a panic attack: choose a brief line of Scripture or a truth about God that comforts you, and repeat half of it on the inhale and half on the exhale. For example:

- **Inhale:** *“The Lord is my shepherd...”* **Exhale:** *“...I lack nothing.”* (From Psalm 23:1)
- **Inhale:** *“When I am afraid...”* **Exhale:** *“...I put my trust in You.”* (From Psalm 56:3)
- **Inhale:** *“Be still...”* **Exhale:** *“...and know that I am God.”* (Psalm 46:10)

Or simply inhale **“Abba”** and exhale **“Father”**, reminding yourself that your heavenly Father is right there with you (Romans 8:15). Some believers use the ancient **Jesus Prayer:** *“Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God”* (inhale), *“have mercy on me”* (exhale). Choose a phrase that anchors you in God’s love and sovereignty. By repeating a truth from Scripture in sync with your breaths, you accomplish two things at once: you calm your **body** and you steady your **mind** on God. This helps break the cycle of fearful thoughts. Instead of your brain screaming *“I’m dying, I can’t handle this,”* you are affirming, *“The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid”* (paraphrase of Hebrews 13:6).

In fact, *speaking or whispering* Scripture in the midst of panic is a powerful practice. **“Faith comes from hearing...the word of Christ”** (Romans 10:17). Hearing truth – even your own voice speaking it – can cut through the lies of panic. Christian counselors have seen this work in practice. One counselor shared the story of a trauma survivor who did exactly this during panic episodes: she would **run to Scriptural truths**, praying them out loud repeatedly and even singing hymns, engaging *“every facet of her being—physical, emotional, and spiritual”* in focusing on God’s promises. Over time, as she *persistently* replaced the lies (negative images and thoughts) with God’s truth, her panic attacks **eventually ceased and never returned**, demonstrating the power of combining Scripture meditation with techniques to calm the nervous system ([Biblical Counseling Coalition](#)). You might not find instant, total relief the first time you try this, but **consistency is key**. Each time you choose to breathe deeply and speak God’s Word in a moment of fear, you are training your mind and body to respond in a new way. You’re also inviting the Holy Spirit to minister His peace to you. Remember Philippians 4:6-7 (NIV): *“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.”* The result? *“And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”* Breathing and prayer are a practical way to *present* your anxious moment to God and receive His peace beyond understanding.

Additional Calming Strategies (Grounding and Reassurance)

Breathing exercises are often the fastest way to physiologically halt a panic attack. However, there are a few **additional strategies** you can use alongside breathing to help ride out the wave of panic. Think of these as other tools in your toolkit:

- **Grounding Techniques:** Grounding means refocusing your attention on the present, tangible reality (instead of the frightening thoughts or sensations in your head). One popular grounding exercise is the **“5-4-3-2-1”** method: Identify 5 things you can see around you, 4 things you can physically feel (your clothing, the floor under your feet, a chair arm), 3 things you can hear (traffic outside, birds chirping, the hum of a fan), 2 things you can smell, and 1 thing you can taste. Either think of them or say them out loud: *“I see a blue wall, I see the window, I see a coffee mug...”*, etc. This technique forces your mind to engage with your environment rather than the internal panic. It can help you feel more



in the moment and safe. Grounding pairs well with slow breathing – for instance, between breaths, look around and describe your surroundings. This also echoes a biblical principle: focusing on *what is true* and real in front of you (Philippians 4:8) instead of the “what if” fears in your mind. Many people find that grounding can reduce the sense of “derealization” (feeling detached or unreal) that sometimes comes with panic.

- **Muscle Relaxation:** Panic attacks often cause muscle tension – you might find your shoulders hunched, fists clenched, jaw tight, etc. Deliberately relaxing your muscles can send a signal back to your brain that things are okay. A technique called **progressive muscle relaxation** is very useful. Starting from your feet and moving upward (or vice versa), tense a specific muscle group hard for about 5 seconds (for example, curl your toes and tense your feet), then release and relax it. Do this for your calves, thighs, abdomen, hands, arms, shoulders, neck, and face. As you release each tensed muscle, you can say the word “**relax**” or breathe out. This practice not only distracts you from panic, it also counters the physical tension of panic. If the mind senses the body relaxing, it reinforces the message that “we’re safe.” Even simply rolling your shoulders and unclenching your jaw while you take a slow breath can help. (If you’re in a public setting, you can do this subtly with smaller muscle groups like hands or legs that others may not notice.)
- **Positive Self-Talk and Reassurance:** In the throes of a panic attack, your thoughts might be screaming negative or scary things (“I’m going to die,” “I’m losing control,” “I can’t handle this”). One strategy is to counter those with calm, factual reassurances. Remind yourself of truths such as: *“I’ve had this feeling before and it passed.” “This is a panic attack. It is not a heart attack. I will get through it.” “These feelings are uncomfortable, but they are not dangerous.”* Acknowledge that you’re afraid, but also affirm that **this will pass soon**. (As noted earlier, panic symptoms usually peak and subside within minutes.) Some people find it helpful to even time the attack – noticing “Okay, it’s 2:10 PM, by 2:20 PM I will likely feel much better,” since panic often winds down in ~10 minutes. This kind of self-coaching is supported by research and is commonly recommended by therapists. For Christians, self-reassurance can be further grounded in faith: *“God is with me right now.” “I am not alone in this.” “God’s power is made perfect in my weakness.”* Reminding yourself of God’s promises (“He will never leave me nor forsake me,” “He cares for me”) as you breathe can quell the spiritual panic (the fear that you’re abandoned or helpless) and replace it with a sense of His presence.
- **Change Your Surroundings (if possible):** If your situation allows, **find a calmer environment**. Panic can be exacerbated by a crowded, noisy, or confined setting. Simply stepping outside for a bit of fresh air and open space can help. Or if you’re in a meeting or church service and feel panic rising, quietly slip out to the restroom or hallway for a moment to practice your breathing exercises. Removing yourself from excess stimuli can make it easier to regain control. You might also find certain sensory comforts helpful: wrapping yourself in a cozy blanket, splashing cool water on your face, or holding an ice cube (the cold sensation can “reset” your system). Such actions can break the mental loop of panic. **However**, be cautious with this tip: if you *always* flee the situation whenever you feel panic, it can reinforce the idea that the situation was dangerous, which isn’t true. So use environmental change as a temporary relief strategy, but continue to remind yourself (and prove to yourself) that you can handle being in those situations through the coping skills you’re learning. Over time, as you gain confidence, the need to leave will hopefully diminish.

Each of these strategies can complement the foundational tool of **controlled breathing**. Think of breathing exercises as your first line of defense – they directly address your body’s alarm. The other techniques above



address your *mind* (through refocusing or reassurance) and your *environment*. By using a combination, you're tackling the panic on multiple fronts. And in all these, you can invite God's help: *"Lord, help me see what's around me clearly," "Lord, relax my tense muscles," "Lord, replace these lies with Your truth."* The Lord cares about every detail, and *"He himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else"* (Acts 17:25, NIV).

A Real-Life Example: Finding Peace Through Breath and Faith

To illustrate how these principles come together, let's consider a brief **case study** (a composite based on real experiences). **Jane** is a 38-year-old Christian woman who began experiencing panic attacks after a car accident a few years ago. At their worst, she was having **about two panic attacks per week**. During an attack, her heart rate would skyrocket (often above 130 beats per minute), she would get chest pain and dizziness, and be gripped by an intense fear that she was going to die or "go crazy." The peak of terror typically lasted 5-10 minutes, then left her exhausted. Jane also felt great **spiritual distress** about these episodes – she wondered, "Why can't I just trust God more and not feel this way? What's wrong with me?" The anxiety and guilt together were stealing her joy. She began avoiding driving on highways and even cut back on certain church activities for fear of having an attack in public.

When Jane finally sought help, her counselor taught her two key breathing techniques (diaphragmatic breathing and 4-7-8 breathing) and helped her make a **panic plan** that included prayer and truth statements. Jane also chose a short Bible verse to focus on: *"Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you"* (1 Peter 5:7, NIV). The next time she felt a panic attack brewing (while in a grocery store checkout line), she remembered her training. She **accepted what was happening** ("Okay, this is a panic attack. I've gotten through them before; it will pass."), and immediately began **belly breathing** in slow counts. She also started repeating in her mind, *"God cares for me. I cast this anxiety on Him."* Her initial instinct was to run out of the store, but she challenged the thought — she knew she was actually safe, just very anxious. So she stayed in line, breathing slowly. She even managed to pull out her phone and play a 30-second audio clip of her favorite worship song to help redirect her thoughts. After about **1-2 minutes**, the surge of panic had peaked and was subsiding instead of spiraling further. Her heart rate, which she had noticed was 140 bpm at the start, came down to around 90 bpm. She no longer felt faint; the floor was under her feet again (she even literally wiggled her toes in her shoes as a grounding trick). She left the store **victorious** – the panic attack had been stopped in its tracks.

Over the next few months, Jane continued to practice her breathing and prayer techniques whenever she sensed anxiety rising. She also made it a habit to do **5 minutes of slow, deep breathing each morning** as a preventative measure, often meditating on a comforting Scripture at the same time. She kept a journal and noted that initially her panic attacks went from 2 per week to about **1 every two weeks** after a month of practice. And those she did have were less intense – on a 0-10 scale of fear, they were maybe a 6 instead of a 10, and she could shorten them with her techniques. After three months, she realized she hadn't had a full-blown panic attack in over a month. She also started driving on highways again and attending her small group at church regularly, without the old fear of "What if I panic?" hanging over her. Importantly, Jane also grew spiritually through this process. Instead of seeing her panic as a shameful lack of faith, she saw it as **an area where God's strength could lift her up**. She memorized more Scriptures about peace, began praying daily about her worries, and even opened up to her Bible study group about her anxiety – which led to others sharing and supporting each other. In her journal she wrote, *"I no longer feel condemned for my anxiety. I feel equipped to handle it, and I know God is walking with me. Each victory is really His victory in me."*



This example shows how combining **practical coping skills** and **dependence on God** can transform a situation. Panic attacks went from being a terrifying, debilitating force to a manageable challenge that Jane could face with confidence. It wasn't overnight, and occasional setbacks happened, but she saw clear progress. And her faith deepened, because she experienced God's care in a very tangible way. The promise of Isaiah 26:3 proved true for her: *"You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in You"* (NIV). By steadily refocusing her mind on God (which breathing exercises gave her the physical calm to do), she opened the door for **God's peace** to flood in and guard her heart.

Long-Term Growth: Addressing Root Causes and Embracing Help

Stopping an individual panic attack is a tremendous relief – it's like calming a sudden storm. Over the long term, though, you'll want to **reduce the frequency and power of those storms** altogether. That usually means addressing the underlying causes or triggers of your panic and investing in overall mental, physical, and spiritual well-being. Here are some considerations for long-term growth:

- **Identify Triggers and Underlying Fears:** Take time to reflect (perhaps with a counselor or in a journal) on what might *set off* your panic attacks. Sometimes there are specific triggers – e.g. crowded places, driving, certain memories or sensations. Other times panic seems to come "out of the blue," but even then there may be underlying stressors or thought patterns (like a deep fear of loss of control or health anxiety) that fuel it. If you can identify specific **triggers**, you and a counselor can work on gradually desensitizing those (through exposure therapy techniques or developing specific strategies for those situations). Equally important, try to uncover the **thoughts or beliefs** that accompany your panic. Common ones are "I'm in danger," "I'm helpless," or "I'm going to go insane." Once you identify these, you can begin to challenge and replace them. This is essentially the cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) approach, which aligns well with biblical teaching to *"take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ"* (2 Corinthians 10:5). For example, if your underlying belief is "If I have a panic attack, I'll die," you can confront that with truth: *"My times are in God's hands (Psalm 31:15). He's in control of my life and I've survived panic before – it has never actually killed me and it won't now."* If a belief is "People will think I'm crazy," combat that with *"God's opinion matters most, and He knows I'm just struggling with a common condition. Also, many people are more understanding than I assume – and if they're not, that's their problem, not mine."* This kind of **thought replacement** takes practice, but it directly lessens the power of panic at its root. It's what the apostle Paul means when he says to *"be transformed by the renewing of your mind"* (Romans 12:2, NIV). Over time, as your mind embraces truth, the emotional alarm bells (panic) don't ring so loudly. Some deep-seated fears may relate to past trauma or experiences (as in Jane's case, a car accident). In such cases, it can be extremely helpful to work with a therapist, especially a Christian counselor who can integrate biblical truth with trauma-informed techniques. They can help you process those events and "detoxify" the traumatic memories that might be triggering panic. **Bottom line:** Panic attacks often have both a physiological and a cognitive component. We handle the physiology with breathing; we handle the cognition with truth. Both are part of God's plan for healing.
- **Build a Lifestyle of Calm and Trust:** If you battle anxiety regularly, it's wise to make some lifestyle adjustments that promote calmness **before** panic even strikes. Consider incorporating relaxation practices into your daily routine. This could be **breathwork exercises** (like 5–10 minutes of diaphragmatic breathing each morning or evening), **stretching or yoga** (if you're comfortable with it – focusing on the physical exercise aspect), or **regular aerobic exercise** like walking, which has been shown to reduce anxiety. Exercise, done in moderation, can burn off stress hormones and make your

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nervous system more resilient. Also, pay attention to your sleep – being well-rested can greatly reduce overall anxiety. Reduce or eliminate caffeine if you find it makes you jittery; many panic sufferers are very sensitive to stimulants. Treat your body kindly: a balanced diet, hydration, and avoiding too much alcohol (which can spike anxiety rebound) will give you a more stable baseline. From a spiritual perspective, cultivate habits of *peace*. Daily time in prayer and Scripture, even when you're not anxious, will build your faith and fortify you for when anxiety does come. Some people find that practicing Christian mindfulness or meditative prayer (such as quietly meditating on a single attribute of God) helps keep their stress in check. As Isaiah 26:3 says, God keeps in "*perfect peace*" those whose minds are "*stayed*" on Him. Developing a habit of casting your small worries on God each day can prevent a buildup of tension that might otherwise explode as panic. Think of it like preventative medicine: a life paced with God's rhythms (Sabbath rest, prayer, fellowship) leaves less room for panic to take hold.

- **Share Your Struggle and Seek Support:** One of the devil's tactics is to make us feel isolated in our problems. Don't fall for it – **reach out to supportive people**. This could mean talking to a trusted friend or family member about your panic attacks. Often just telling someone, "*Hey, I struggle with anxiety, and sometimes I might need to step outside to calm down,*" removes a huge layer of worry (the worry about *others* worrying!). You might discover they have experienced something similar or know someone who has. If you have a spouse or close friend, teach them the basics of what helps you (e.g. "If you see me panicking, remind me to breathe slow and maybe pray with me"). Knowing that someone "has your back" can make a panic attack far less intimidating. Moreover, **consider Christian counseling** or joining a support group. There are many Christian counselors who specialize in anxiety; they can provide a safe space to work through both the physical techniques and the spiritual issues (like trust, control, surrender) related to anxiety. Sometimes panic disorder benefits from a structured therapy group where people practice facing their fears in small steps. The Bible encourages us to "*carry each other's burdens*" (Galatians 6:2), and that includes things like anxiety. Don't think you have to just white-knuckle this alone with God – often God's answer to our prayers for help comes through *people* He sends. A wonderful development in recent years is the reduced stigma in Christian circles around mental health. Pastors, authors, and even theologians have opened up about their own battles with anxiety or depression. It might encourage you to read a Christian book on anxiety (e.g., *Anxious for Nothing* by Max Lucado or *Running Scared* by Ed Welch) to remind you that your experience is part of a larger human (and Christian) experience, and there is hope.
- **Embrace Professional Help and Medicine if Needed – Without Guilt:** Sometimes, despite your best efforts with breathing exercises, prayer, and lifestyle changes, panic attacks may remain very frequent or severe. Or perhaps the level of anxiety is so high that you struggle to even implement the coping strategies. In such cases, **professional treatment** is important. This can include therapy (like cognitive-behavioral therapy, exposure therapy, etc.) and, for some people, **medication**. If your doctor or psychiatrist recommends a medication (such as an anti-anxiety medication or antidepressant), know that **taking medication is not a sign of spiritual failure**. It's similar to taking insulin for diabetes or blood pressure medicine for hypertension – it addresses a physical aspect of a condition. The Bible does not forbid the use of medicine. In fact, Scripture acknowledges the role of physicians and remedies (Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick," in Mark 2:17, and Proverbs 17:22 speaks of a cheerful heart as good medicine, implying the concept of medicine itself is positive). A Christian counseling resource addresses this question directly: "*Is it sinful to try psychiatric medication?... No, taking anti-anxiety medicines is not wrong because you are*



doing it to find relief and the ability to function at an improved level. This is a worthwhile goal and morally acceptable.” ([Biblical Counseling Center](#)). In other words, using medication under proper medical guidance can be a gift from God for your healing. Medications can stabilize the physical symptoms (for instance, certain medications can prevent the sudden adrenaline spikes or help regulate brain chemicals like serotonin), which might give you the window of calm needed to then work on the spiritual and emotional aspects. Many Christians take medications for anxiety or depression; it's often part of God's provision.

That said, medication is usually **most effective when combined with counseling and lifestyle changes**. Medicine can take the edge off the physical intensity of anxiety, but by itself it typically doesn't "solve" the inner thought patterns or teach you coping skills (and certainly doesn't replace spiritual growth). As one counselor put it, medication can change how anxiety *feels* in your body, but it can't change what your mind is *focused on* or address the root fears ⁴. So, a balanced approach might be: take medication for a season if needed to get relief and function (there's no shame in that), and concurrently pursue therapy, support, and spiritual growth so that you're attacking the problem from all sides. If you do take medication, always do so under the care of a licensed medical professional, follow their instructions, and continue in prayer asking God to use it for your good. Many have testified that medications were a helpful tool that God used in their journey, much like how insulin is a tool for a diabetic Christian – not a replacement for faith, but an aid to live a healthier life *with* faith. Whether or not you personally need medication is a decision between you, your doctor, and God's leading, but **know that it's an option and not a betrayal of your trust in God**. God often works through ordinary means (doctors, medicine, counseling) to bring about His healing.

Finally, as you work on long-term growth, **be patient and celebrate progress**. Overcoming anxiety or panic is usually a gradual process, with ups and downs. You might have weeks of no attacks and then a bad one pops up – don't despair. It doesn't erase the progress you've made. Look back and thank God for how far you've come, even if you have further to go. The Apostle Paul had a "thorn in the flesh" that he asked God to remove, and God's answer was, *"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."* Paul then said, *"When I am weak, then I am strong"* (2 Corinthians 12:9-10). In a way, panic attacks can be a thorn – something you wish God would just remove instantly. Sometimes He does grant instantaneous healing, but often He instead invites us to journey with Him through a healing process, so that we learn to rely on His grace daily. In that journey, **His power shows up in our weakness**. Every time you choose to breathe and pray instead of giving in to terror, you are experiencing God's strength in your weakness. It may not feel "strong" at the time – perhaps it feels like a very trembling sort of trust – but it *is* growth. Over months and years, you will look back and see a transformation: perhaps you're not 100% anxiety-free (few people are, this side of heaven), but maybe you're no longer debilitated by it, and you now have a deeper empathy for others and a deeper dependence on Christ than you did before. That is genuine *fruit* coming out of a trial.

Cultivating Peace and Joy in Christ

Walking the path from paralyzing panic to a place of peace is a journey, but it's a journey **with Jesus by your side**. As you practice the strategies we've discussed – breathing exercises, grounding techniques, prayer, truth-focused thinking, and wise use of resources – remember that ultimately your peace comes from *Him*. The breathing exercises are a tool to help you receive that peace. Think of when Jesus was with His terrified disciples in the storm, and with just a word He calmed the wind and waves. In moments of panic, He can calm the storm in you. Sometimes He calms it instantaneously; other times He calms *you* while the storm rages for a bit. In either case, *He is present*.



God's desire for you is not a life ruled by fear, but a life filled with peace and joy. The night before He went to the cross, knowing the disciples would be anxious, Jesus said to them: *"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you... Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid"* ([John 14:27, NIV](#)). And later, *"I have told you these things, so that in Me you may have peace"* (John 16:33). These promises are for you as well. Your panic attacks have not caught God by surprise; He foresaw them and made provision for you to have **Christ's own peace** in the midst of any storm. *"God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind"* (2 Timothy 1:7, NKJV). Through the Holy Spirit, you **have** a sound mind – sometimes it just takes a bit of work to uncover it beneath the swirl of adrenaline and worry. But it's there, and God will help you strengthen it.

Day by day, as you rely on Him and practice these godly coping skills, you'll find that fear loosens its grip. The Bible often shows a contrast between fear and joy. Anxiety can feel like a thief of joy – but God's consolation brings joy back. *"When anxiety was great within me, your consolation brought me joy"* (Psalm 94:19, NIV). It's a beautiful testimony that on the other side of great anxiety, God's comfort produces deep joy. Many who have come through seasons of panic will tell you they now have a greater joy in the Lord than before, precisely because they experienced His personal care in their lowest moments. **You, too, can live a joyful life again**, even if it seems distant right now.

As you continue to apply what you've learned – breathing slowly, praying fervently, thinking truthfully, and seeking support wisely – trust that the Lord is **faithful** to complete the work in you. It may be a gradual melting of fear or it may be dramatic breakthroughs, but *"those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength"* (Isaiah 40:31). Keep your eyes on Jesus, who lovingly says, *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest"* (Matthew 11:28, NIV). He is the source of true rest for your soul. And remember the promise of Romans 15:13: *"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."* That is our prayer for you. With practical steps and God's power working together, panic can be overcome. Keep breathing, keep believing, and let His peace guard your heart and mind in Christ Jesus.

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1 2 3 'Cyclic sighing' can help breathe away anxiety

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