



Panic Attack Tips for First-Time Sufferers

Introduction:

A panic attack can strike out of the blue – one moment you're fine, and the next you're overwhelmed by a wave of intense fear. Your heart races, your chest tightens, you feel dizzy and out of control, perhaps even convinced you're dying. If you've experienced your first panic attack, you're not alone. *Panic attacks are surprisingly common*: every year, up to **1 in 10** people in the U.S. experiences one ¹, and an estimated **35% of people** will have a panic attack at least once in their lifetime ². The good news is that **panic attacks, while terrifying, are not life-threatening** ³. They are treatable, and you can learn to manage them with a combination of **faith-based encouragement** and **practical strategies** from psychology and medicine. In this guide, we'll draw on Christian wisdom and scientific research to provide compassionate, effective tips for first-time sufferers of panic attacks. You'll learn what's happening in your body during a panic episode, immediate steps to find calm, and long-term approaches – from prayer and Scripture to therapy and lifestyle changes – that foster peace and resilience.

Understanding Panic Attacks:

A **panic attack** is a sudden episode of intense fear or anxiety that triggers acute physical reactions *even though there is no real danger or obvious cause*. In a panic attack, the body's **"fight-or-flight" response** kicks in improperly, as if you were facing a life-threatening emergency ⁴ ⁵. Adrenaline and stress hormones surge, preparing you to fight or flee, which causes symptoms like a **racing heart, shortness of breath, sweating, chest pain, trembling, dizziness, hot or cold flashes, nausea**, and tingling in the hands or face ⁶ ⁷. You might feel an overwhelming sense of doom, fear you're "going crazy," or even fear you're about to die ⁸. These reactions peak within minutes – panic symptoms **usually crest around 10 minutes** into the attack and then begin to subside ⁹. *Medically, a panic attack by itself won't harm you* – it doesn't cause a heart attack or stop you from breathing, even though it feels awful ³. Knowing this fact can be reassuring: **the panic will pass** and the intense sensations will fade in a short time ¹⁰.

If you've only had one panic attack, you likely *do not have panic disorder*. Many people have an isolated panic episode during high stress or after a health scare and never develop ongoing problems ¹¹ ¹². However, some go on to experience recurrent attacks and begin to fear the next episode so much that they avoid situations that might trigger one. This pattern is known as **panic disorder**, an anxiety disorder marked by frequent unexpected panic attacks and persistent anxiety about having more ¹³ ¹⁴. Only about **2-3% of people** develop panic disorder long-term ¹⁵ ¹⁶, and women are affected about twice as often as men ¹⁷ ¹⁸. **Importantly, having a panic attack does NOT mean you're "weak" or "lacking faith."** Even strong believers can suffer from anxiety. The Bible gives examples of godly people feeling overwhelming fear – *King David*, for instance, described a time of distress by saying, **"My heart is in anguish within me... Fear and trembling have beset me; horror has overwhelmed me"** (Psalm 55:4-5, NIV). Even **Jesus** experienced extreme anguish in the Garden of Gethsemane before His arrest – *"my soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death,"* He said (Matthew 26:38, NIV), and His sweat fell like drops of blood (Luke 22:44). These examples show that intense anxiety can afflict anyone, and it is not a sin to experience it ¹⁹. What matters is how we respond and seek help. As Jesus Himself told His disciples, *"In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world"* (John 16:33, NIV). With God's help and wise strategies, you **can overcome** the grip of panic and find peace again.



Immediate Steps to Take During a Panic Attack

When a panic attack strikes, you need **quick, simple tools** to ride out the storm. The goal is to help your mind and body slow down the false alarm. Here are **practical steps** – blending proven therapeutic techniques with spiritual comfort – that you can use *in the moment* to alleviate a panic attack:

1. **Remind Yourself: “This Will Pass.”** In the midst of panic, remind yourself that what you’re feeling is *a temporary episode of anxiety* and not a physical crisis. Many doctors note that a panic attack *peaks within 10 minutes* and then subsides on its own ²⁰. Tell yourself: *“I am having a panic attack. It’s frightening, but it’s not dangerous. These feelings will pass in a few minutes.”* Acknowledging that the panic is time-limited can reduce your fear of the symptoms. This technique is recommended by anxiety experts – recognizing the sensations as a panic attack (and not something like a heart attack) helps to defuse the fear of imminent doom ¹⁰. **Trust that the Lord will carry you through it:** *“When I am afraid, I put my trust in You”* (Psalm 56:3, NIV). Reminding yourself of God’s presence can bring calm. For example, many people find it comforting to repeat a simple truth like *“God is with me; I am not facing this alone”* as they breathe through the panic.
2. **Breathe Slowly and Deeply.** *Deep breathing* is one of the **most effective** techniques for calming a panic attack ²¹. During panic, you might start breathing fast or shallow (hyperventilating), which can make symptoms worse by dropping carbon dioxide levels in your blood and causing dizziness or tingling ²². To counter this, deliberately slow your breath: **inhale deeply** through your nose for about 4 seconds, feeling your belly expand; **hold** for a second or two; then **exhale** gently through your mouth for 4 or more seconds. You can also try the popular **“4-7-8” breathing** method: breathe in for 4 seconds, hold for 7 seconds, and exhale over 8 seconds ²³. This kind of diaphragmatic breathing activates your parasympathetic nervous system – the body’s calming “rest and digest” mode – which lowers heart rate and blood pressure. In fact, research shows that controlled deep breathing can significantly benefit people with anxiety and panic, helping to reduce symptoms ²¹. As you breathe, *remember how God breathed the breath of life into us* (Genesis 2:7) – use each breath to draw in His peace and exhale your fear. Some Christians pray short “breath prayers” alongside deep breathing; for example, as you inhale think, *“The Lord is my shepherd”* and as you exhale, *“I shall not fear.”* This combines physical relaxation with spiritual focus.
3. **Ground Yourself in the Present.** Panic attacks tend to flood your mind with catastrophic thoughts (“I’m dying,” “I’m suffocating,” “I’m losing control”). To break out of that mental spiral, engage in **grounding techniques** – exercises that anchor you to the present reality and your immediate surroundings. One simple method is to **focus on a single object** around you ²⁴. For instance, pick up a familiar item (a pen, your keys, a cross necklace) and *describe it to yourself*: its color, texture, weight, the details you see. This redirects your racing thoughts toward something concrete and non-threatening ²⁵. Similarly, you can use the **“5-4-3-2-1” sensory method**, which is a form of mindfulness grounding ²⁶: look for **5 things** you can see and name them, then **4 things** you can feel (your clothes against your skin, the floor under your feet), **3 things** you can hear (distant traffic, birds singing), **2 things** you can smell (maybe your coffee or hand lotion), and **1 thing** you can taste (even just noting the taste in your mouth) ²⁷. This exercise forces your mind to engage with the present moment and physical sensations, which can significantly **reduce the intensity of panic symptoms** ²⁸ ²⁹. Grounding yourself reminds you that *right here and now, you are safe*. As Scripture says, *“Be still, and know that I am God”* (Psalm 46:10, NIV) – focusing on the here and now,



and God's steady presence in it, can help you feel more in control when anxiety tries to sweep you away.

4. **Use a Calming Phrase or Verse.** Many people find it helpful to **repeat a mantra** or soothing phrase during a panic attack ³⁰. In a secular context, a mantra might be a simple phrase like "This too shall pass" or a word like "calm." As Christians, we have the rich resource of Scripture to draw on for powerful calming truths. Quoting or meditating on a short Bible verse can serve the same purpose as a mantra, with the added comfort of God's promise behind it. For example, you might quietly speak or think: *"The Lord is with me; I will not be afraid"* (Psalm 118:6), or *"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you... Do not let your hearts be troubled"* (John 14:27, NIV). One believer who struggled with panic attacks wrote down Philippians 4:6-7 on a small card – *"Do not be anxious about anything... And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus"* – and would pull it out to read and repeat whenever panic struck. **Repeating a truth** like *"God's got me in His hands"* or *"Jesus, give me Your peace"* can refocus your mind on God's care rather than the wave of fear. This aligns with the advice therapists give to use positive self-talk or reassurances in panic moments ³¹. As you concentrate on the words, *your breathing and heart rate may slow down* and your muscles may begin to relax ³² ³³. Indeed, research on anxiety suggests that speaking or thinking through a comforting phrase can engage the brain's calming pathways and ease stress ³⁰. **Call on Jesus** – even a simple *"Lord, help me"* – and remember He is near. The name of Jesus itself can be a reassuring focus, *"for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go"* (Joshua 1:9, NIV).

5. **Relocate or Get Comfortable (If Possible).** If your surroundings are contributing to the panic (crowds, noise, heat), try to **move to a calmer environment**. Simply stepping outside or into a quieter room can help. The U.K.'s National Health Service notes that finding a *peaceful spot* or changing posture (e.g. sitting down against a wall) can make it easier to focus on breathing and calming down ³⁴. For example, if you feel panic rising during a church service or at the grocery store, slip into a hallway or step outside for a moment. Reducing external stimuli – bright lights, loud sounds, jostling people – signals to your brain that it's okay to relax. While you can't always flee the situation, even *shifting your position* (sitting instead of standing, leaning on something solid) can provide a small sense of security and control ³⁵. *Biblically*, there's precedent for stepping aside to find calm – Jesus often **withdrew to quiet places** to pray when He was distressed (Luke 5:16). In a panic attack, it's perfectly okay to politely excuse yourself from the meeting or crowd for a few minutes. Find a place where you feel a bit more secure, take those deep breaths, and remind yourself of God's calming presence. *(If you're driving when a panic attack hits, immediately pull over to a safe spot and park until you feel calm again. Many people experience their first panic attack while driving – if this happens, turn on hazard lights if needed, focus on breathing, and know that the feelings will pass.)*

6. **Engage Your Muscles – Then Relax Them.** Panic floods your body with adrenaline, often causing muscle tension and trembling. Actively managing that tension can short-circuit the panic response. One useful technique is **Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR)** ³⁶. This involves tensing a muscle group for a few seconds, then releasing it, to help your body relax. You can do a quick version of this during a panic attack: for example, **clench your fists tightly** for 5 seconds, then let go and shake out the tension; **shrug your shoulders up** to your ears, hold briefly, then drop them; or **press your legs down** hard into your chair for a moment, then release. As you consciously relax each area, your brain receives signals that the body is calming down. In fact, studies have found PMR to be an *effective method for coping with anxiety and panic* ³⁶. It works on the principle that it's hard to feel



mentally panicked when your body is physically relaxed. As the Medical News Today resource on panic attacks notes, *"If the mind senses that the body is relaxing, other symptoms – such as rapid breathing – may also diminish."* ³⁶ . While doing this, you might pray something simple like, *"Lord, release the tension in me; fill me with Your peace."* Think of Psalm 94:19, *"When anxiety was great within me, your consolation brought me joy."* As you progressively release your muscle tension, imagine God's consolation flooding in to *"bring joy"* and relief in place of anxiety.

- 7. Ask for Support (Tell Someone You Trust).** Panic can be very isolating – you might feel embarrassed or afraid of others noticing. But if there is a caring person nearby, **don't be afraid to ask for help**. Simply telling a friend, family member, or even a kind stranger, "I'm having a panic attack, could you just sit with me a moment?" can make a big difference. They can help you find a quiet corner, fetch a glass of water, or talk you through it. Sometimes just knowing someone else is watching out for you provides a sense of safety. If you are among friends or at church when it happens, consider confiding in one person about what you're experiencing. They might pray with you or gently remind you to breathe. The Bible encourages us to **"bear one another's burdens"** (Galatians 6:2), and that can include emotional burdens like anxiety. Often, people are more understanding than we fear – panic attacks are common enough that many will either have experienced one or know someone who has. So you might say, "I need a moment, I think I'm having an anxiety attack, can you walk outside with me?" You may be surprised how quickly a compassionate friend will come to your aid. **Don't battle it alone if you don't have to**. If you're alone, and it's really overwhelming, consider calling someone (or even an anxiety hotline) just to have a calm voice talk you through the few minutes of peak panic. Knowing that *"two are better than one"* (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10) and that others can help you up when you fall is a biblical principle that applies here – *community care* can help get you through. And of course, **turn to God in prayer** as your ever-present support: *"Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you"* (1 Peter 5:7, NIV). Whispering a prayer to Jesus and knowing *He* is right there with you can give you courage to endure those intense moments.

Every person might find a different combination of these tactics most helpful – the key is to **have a plan** for coping. By practicing breathing, grounding, and prayer when you *aren't* in a panic, you'll be more prepared to deploy them when panic strikes. Writing a short list of "panic tools" (even saved on your phone) can remind you of what to do in the moment. For example, one sufferer kept a note that said: *"1. Breathe (10 slow breaths), 2. Look at surroundings and name 5 things, 3. Say a prayer (Phil 4:6-7), 4. This will pass soon."* Simply reading that plan when she felt panic coming on gave her a sense of control and helped shorten the attack. **Preparation and faith go hand-in-hand**: just as Nehemiah prayed *and* posted guards for protection (Nehemiah 4:9), you can pray for God's help *and* practice practical calming techniques. Both are expressions of hope and wise action.

Spiritual Strategies for Ongoing Peace

Our faith can be a tremendous source of strength in overcoming anxiety. Rather than viewing panic attacks purely as a medical issue, Christians see the person holistically – body, mind, and spirit. **Tending to your spiritual life** will not only deepen your relationship with God; it can also reduce the frequency and power of



anxiety in your life. Here are some spiritual disciplines and approaches, supported by Scripture and even scientific research, that can help calm your heart and mind over the long term:

- **Prayer and Surrender:** *Prayer* is our first line of defense against anxiety. Philippians 4:6 (NIV) urges, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.” Turning our worries into prayers has a way of transferring the burden off our shoulders and onto God’s capable hands. In moments of anxiety, *pour out your heart to God*. Tell Him exactly what you fear – whether it’s “I’m afraid of having another panic attack when I go out” or “I fear I’m losing control.” God invites us to do this: “Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you.” (1 Peter 5:7). **Prayer not only has spiritual benefits, but also physiological ones.** Remarkably, studies have found that sincere prayer can activate the body’s relaxation response. One research review noted that prayer (especially meditative or contemplative prayer) often leads to *lower heart rate, reduced muscle tension, slower breathing rate*, and even changes in brain chemistry associated with calm and focus ³⁷. In essence, heartfelt prayer can shift our nervous system from fight-or-flight mode into a state of peace by increasing parasympathetic (calming) activity ³⁸. Even a simple practice like repeating the Lord’s Prayer slowly, or praying through a Psalm (like Psalm 23) while breathing deeply, can physiologically soothe your body and mind. The key is to pray in a way that draws you into trust. As one Baylor University study on prayer and anxiety found, *prayers of praise and trusting God’s will* tend to **correlate with lower anxiety**, whereas frantic or doubting prayers can sometimes maintain anxiety ³⁹ ⁴⁰. So, focus on God’s power and love. For example, in prayer declare, “God, I know You are in control. You love me and will carry me through this.” Thank Him for past faithfulness. This aligns your mind with a posture of trust, which undercuts the fuel of panic (panic feeds on the belief of imminent catastrophe and aloneness). Jesus said, “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). Regular prayer is one way we continually hand our troubled hearts over to Christ and receive His peace in return.
- **Meditating on Scripture:** God’s Word is a powerful antidote to the lies that anxiety tells us. Panic often involves distorted thoughts – “I’m about to die... I can’t handle this... I’m alone in this.” Scripture speaks truth to each of those: “I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord” (Psalm 118:17); “I can do all this through Him who gives me strength” (Philippians 4:13); “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you,” says the Lord (Hebrews 13:5). **Make a habit of meditating on calming Bible verses daily**, not just during panic moments. Much like a daily vitamin builds your physical health, daily Scripture meditation builds spiritual and mental resilience. You might memorize a few key verses about fear and peace. Some favorites for anxiety include Isaiah 41:10 (“So do not fear, for I am with you... I will strengthen you and help you”), 2 Timothy 1:7 (“For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, love, and a sound mind”), and Psalm 94:19 (“When anxiety was great within me, your consolation brought me joy”). By internalizing these promises, you create a mental arsenal to draw from when panic feelings start. There is even **evidence that faith-focused meditation can reduce anxiety**: in one study, participants who spent 12 minutes a day meditating on Scripture experienced reductions in stress and increased sense of peace compared to before. This makes sense – meditation on God’s Word combines aspects of mindfulness (which is known to calm the mind) with the comforting content of Scripture, yielding both psychological and spiritual benefits. When you meditate on verses like Psalm 23 (“The Lord is my shepherd... he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul”), you’re essentially practicing a form of guided imagery and cognitive restructuring. You’re picturing God’s care (quiet waters, green pastures) and replacing anxious thoughts with hopeful ones. Romans 12:2 talks about “the renewing of your mind.” In a way,



meditating on Scripture renews our anxious minds, gradually aligning our thought patterns with God's truth instead of the worst-case scenarios of panic. Over time, this can decrease the frequency and severity of anxious episodes because your baseline mindset becomes more anchored in trust.

- **Worship and Praise:** It may sound counterintuitive, but **praising God in the midst of anxiety** can shift the atmosphere of your heart. Worship reorients us from our problems to God's greatness. When you feel panic or worry creeping in, try putting on some worship music or singing a favorite hymn. The act of singing not only controls your breathing (many hymns and worship songs naturally guide you to breathe deeply as you sing), but it also fills your mind with uplifting words. There's biblical precedent for music driving away anxious or oppressive spirits – when King Saul was tormented by an evil spirit, young David played the harp and *Saul found relief and felt better* (1 Samuel 16:23). Many have found that listening to gentle worship music can have a **calming, therapeutic effect** during anxiety. Research in music therapy supports this: calming music can lower blood pressure and reduce stress hormones. But beyond the physical, worship invites God's presence into our situation. As Psalm 22:3 suggests, God inhabits the praises of His people. In moments of panic, try softly singing "Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus" or "It Is Well with My Soul," or a simpler chorus like "I Love You Lord." This is not "magic" to stop a panic attack instantly, but it creates an environment of peace where fear cannot easily dominate. Some individuals create a **"peace playlist"** of songs that remind them of God's faithfulness, and they play it each morning or whenever feeling anxious. Over time, these worship habits can raise your baseline of joy and make acute panic less likely. As one Christian counselor advises, "Let worship be your war on anxiety – it's hard for panic to captivate you when you are captivated by praise."
- **Fellowship and Talking about It:** The spiritual community (your church, small group, or trusted Christian friends) can play a key role in overcoming panic attacks. One of anxiety's favorite lies is to tell you "you're the only one" or "no one will understand." But when you gently open up to fellow believers, you often discover others have walked a similar road or are more than willing to support you. **Don't isolate yourself.** The Bible encourages us to *"encourage one another and build each other up"* (1 Thessalonians 5:11). Consider asking a few friends to pray for you regularly regarding anxiety. You might say, "I had a panic attack recently; it was scary. Would you pray that God gives me peace and helps me overcome this?" You may be surprised by the compassion you receive. Some in your church might even have personal experience with panic attacks and can share what helped them. If your church has a prayer team or counseling ministry, take advantage of it. Sometimes a pastoral counselor can help you apply Scripture to your specific fears in very practical ways. Also, simply spending time with supportive Christian friends – talking, enjoying wholesome activities – can alleviate the stress that feeds panic. *Joy and laughter* with others are medicine to a weary heart (Proverbs 17:22). If you're comfortable, you could even **join a support group** for anxiety (some churches or Christian counseling centers run support groups or anxiety workshops). Hearing others' stories breaks the power of shame and assures you that you're not alone. The Bible says *"confess your faults to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed"* (James 5:16). While panic attacks are not "faults" or sins, the principle applies: when we bring our inner struggles into the light of community and prayer, healing can begin. Don't hesitate to lean on your *spiritual family* for help – God often works through **people** to bring comfort. As Paul said, *God comforts us so that we can comfort others in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God* (2 Corinthians 1:4). By sharing what you're going through, you allow others to fulfill this calling.



- **Trust and Surrender (Choosing Faith over Fear):** At its core, overcoming panic attacks as a Christian involves a journey of **learning to trust God more deeply** in every area of your life. Anxiety often targets the “unknowns” and “what-ifs” of life. We worry about *the future, our health, our loved ones, death*, etc., which can all fuel panic. The antidote is gradually surrendering those fears to God’s sovereignty and love. This doesn’t happen overnight, but as you walk with the Lord, you can make daily choices to replace worry with trust. Remember Jesus’s gentle command: *“Do not worry about tomorrow... Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life?”* (Matthew 6:27,34). Jesus invites us to live in the present and trust our Heavenly Father for the future, one day at a time. In moments of anxiety, *practice handing your fears over*: pray, “Lord, I give You this situation. It is bigger than me, but not bigger than You. I trust You to take care of me.” **Visualize placing the fear into God’s hands.** Some people actually find it helpful to physically open their palms and imagine their worry sitting there, then close their hands and lift it up to God as a symbolic act of surrender. This ties in with 1 Peter 5:7 again – casting your anxieties on Him. The promise is that **God cares for you** personally and will work on your behalf. *Choosing faith over fear* also means dwelling on God’s character: He is good, He is in control, He will never abandon you. The more you truly believe *“God is my refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble”* (Psalm 46:1), the less power panic will have. Trust is like a muscle – it grows with exercise. Each time you feel anxiety rising and instead of spiraling you say, “No, I will trust God here,” you are strengthening your faith muscle. Over time, this consistent trust can lead to a marked reduction in anxiety symptoms. It doesn’t mean you’ll never feel anxious (we are all human), but it means the fear doesn’t get to call the shots in your life. One practical suggestion: keep a **“trust journal.”** Write down instances where God came through for you, or verses that remind you of His faithfulness. When you feel panic or worry, read those entries. Recalling God’s past faithfulness builds confidence for the present trial. As the old hymn says, *“Oh for grace to trust Him more!”* – make it your prayer to grow in trust daily.

In summary, nourishing your **spiritual life – through prayer, Scripture, worship, fellowship, and trust – fortifies you against panic.** It addresses the deeper heart issues like fear of uncertainty or death by continually re-rooting you in God’s love and promises. This doesn’t mean you’ll never need other help (as we’ll discuss below, medical and therapeutic interventions are also God-given tools), but it means you are fighting anxiety on the spiritual front as well as the physical/psychological front. *A heart at peace with God becomes a quieter heart.* Isaiah 26:3 promises, *“You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in You.”* As you cultivate a steadfast mind through spiritual disciplines, you enable yourself to live more consistently in God’s peace.

Healthy Lifestyle Habits to Reduce Anxiety

Beyond the moments of acute panic and the spiritual practices, there is another important layer to managing anxiety: **your daily lifestyle.** Our bodies and minds are deeply interconnected (a truth that Scripture implies when it calls our body the “temple of the Holy Spirit” – 1 Corinthians 6:19 – and urges us to care for it). Taking care of your physical health and making certain lifestyle adjustments can significantly lower your overall anxiety levels and make panic attacks less likely. Here are some evidence-based lifestyle strategies to consider:

- **Regular Exercise:** Physical exercise is one of the most effective natural anxiety reducers. When you engage in moderate exercise – such as brisk walking, jogging, cycling, or swimming – your body releases **endorphins**, which are feel-good hormones that improve your mood and act as natural stress relievers ⁴¹. Exercise also lowers stress hormones like cortisol over time. Numerous studies



show that people who exercise regularly tend to have lower overall anxiety and are more resilient to stress. Specifically for panic, research suggests that **light to moderate aerobic exercise practiced consistently can help prevent panic attacks** ⁴². It might be partly because exercise can simulate some physical symptoms (like increased heart rate and breathing), and by experiencing those in a healthy context, your body becomes less sensitized to them. In fact, some therapists incorporate exercise in **interoceptive exposure therapy** for panic (exposing patients to bodily sensations in a safe way) ⁴¹. For a first-time sufferer, starting a simple exercise routine – say a 30-minute walk each morning or a few days of gym workouts a week – can be empowering. Over a few weeks, you may notice improved mood, better sleep, and fewer random anxiety spikes. One study even found that a walking program significantly reduced anxiety in participants over a 10-week period. From a Christian viewpoint, you can see exercise as part of stewarding your body (which God designed wonderfully, per Psalm 139:14) and as a time to perhaps even pray or listen to worship music. One person described her morning runs as “prayer runs” where she would talk to God – benefiting both her spirit and body. *Caution:* extremely intense exercise can temporarily ramp up your heart rate and adrenaline, which in some sensitive individuals *might* trigger panic-like sensations ⁴³. So it’s okay to start gentle – the goal is regular, rhythmic movement that relieves tension. Over time, exercise can become a healthy outlet for stress and an anchor in your routine that keeps anxiety at bay.

- **Mindful Breathing and Relaxation Practices:** We discussed deep breathing as an immediate tool during panic. It’s also valuable to practice **breathing exercises daily** as a preventative measure. Consider setting aside a few minutes each day for *slow, diaphragmatic breathing or meditation*. According to Harvard Health, **breathing exercises, meditation, and muscle relaxation techniques – when practiced regularly – can reduce the frequency of panic attacks** ⁴⁴ ⁴⁵. For instance, you might do 10 minutes of deep breathing and progressive muscle relaxation each evening before bed to unwind your nervous system. Over time, this trains your body to maintain a calmer baseline. **Christian mindfulness** is another tool – this involves quietly focusing your mind on the present with an awareness of God’s presence. One way to do this is through *Christian meditation* on a verse or simply sitting silently in prayer, focusing on your breathing and a truth about God (e.g. breathing in “Abba Father,” breathing out “I rest in You”). This is similar to general mindfulness meditation (which is known to reduce anxiety) but explicitly centered on communion with God. The neurobiological effect of such practices is a shift toward a relaxed brain wave state and lowered blood pressure. Over time, you may find you’re less easily tipped into panic mode because your body has learned how to activate the relaxation response more readily. Think of Jesus’ invitation: “*Come to Me, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest*” (Matthew 11:28). Approaching relaxation as a time of receiving rest from Jesus can be both spiritually and physically rejuvenating.
- **Adequate Sleep:** It’s hard to overstate the importance of **good sleep** for mental health. Lack of sleep or poor-quality sleep can significantly heighten anxiety. When we’re tired, the brain’s emotion-regulation centers (like the amygdala) become more reactive. Ever notice you feel more jittery or irritable after a bad night’s sleep? For someone prone to panic, insomnia or broken sleep can lower the threshold for an attack. Make it a priority to practice healthy sleep hygiene: aim for 7-8 hours of sleep per night, keep a consistent sleep schedule, and create a calming pre-bed routine (no heavy screen time or work right before bed; perhaps read Scripture or journal and pray). Some find drinking a caffeine-free herbal tea or taking a warm bath helps. Spiritually, you can commit your sleep to God’s care each night – for example, praying *Psalm 4:8, “In peace I will lie down and sleep, for You alone, Lord, make me dwell in safety.”* Knowing that God is watching over you can alleviate those anxious thoughts that tend to surface at bedtime. If insomnia persists, consider speaking with a



doctor; sometimes short-term aids or therapy for insomnia might be needed. But start with natural approaches. Getting consistent restful sleep will make your nerves far less jumpy in the day. In one clinical trial, even partial sleep deprivation made people up to 30% more anxious the next day, whereas resolving sleep issues improved anxiety symptoms. So this is a non-negotiable for long-term panic management: **rest is holy and healing** – God designed our bodies to need it, and even Jesus slept during storms (Mark 4:38) as an example of calm trust.

- **Balanced Diet (Watch the Stimulants!):** What you eat (and drink) can affect your anxiety levels. **Caffeine**, in particular, is a common panic trigger. Caffeine is a stimulant that can cause jitters, rapid heartbeat, and nervousness. For someone susceptible to panic attacks, too much caffeine (from coffee, energy drinks, certain teas or sodas, or even chocolate) can provoke panic-like symptoms or heighten existing anxiety ⁴⁶. It stimulates the nervous system in similar ways as stress does. If you had your first panic attack, take an honest look at your caffeine intake. It might be wise to reduce it or cut it out for a while to see if you feel calmer. Many panic sufferers report significant improvement after cutting back on coffee. The Harvard Health article on panic notes that **excessive intake of caffeine or other stimulants can trigger panic-like symptoms and even panic attacks in susceptible individuals** ⁴⁶. Beyond caffeine, a generally balanced diet – with plenty of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean protein, and staying hydrated – supports stable blood sugar and mood. Skipping meals or eating lots of sugary foods can lead to blood sugar spikes and crashes, which might mimic anxiety (think shaking or heart palpitations when you're very hungry or after a sugar rush). Try to eat regular, nutritious meals. Some nutrients are linked to mood regulation (for example, B vitamins, magnesium, omega-3 fatty acids); while you typically get these from a healthy diet, some people consider supplements under a doctor's guidance. Also, **avoid excessive alcohol and smoking**. While a drink might feel like it calms nerves initially, alcohol can disrupt sleep and rebound anxiety once it wears off. Smoking (nicotine) is another stimulant that can increase anxiety and panic risk in the long run. From a Christian perspective, treating your body kindly with nutrition is part of honoring God with your body. It doesn't mean you can't enjoy treats, but moderation and care in consumption can strengthen your system against anxiety. As 1 Corinthians 10:31 says, *"So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God."* Eating and drinking in a way that promotes a sound mind is one way to glorify God.
- **Stress Management and Rest:** Chronic stress primes your body for anxiety and panic. If you're under a lot of stress (work pressure, family issues, etc.), it's important to incorporate routines of **rest and relaxation** to let your system recover. This is actually biblical – God instituted the Sabbath principle (a day of rest each week) for our benefit (Mark 2:27). Ensure you have at least one day a week or regular times where you truly disconnect from work, unplug from news or social media (which can fuel anxiety), and engage in restorative activities. That could be spending time in nature (which often soothes anxiety), hobbies like painting or gardening, or simply enjoying family time. *"Better is a handful of quietness than two hands full of toil and a striving after wind,"* says Ecclesiastes 4:6. In practical terms, learning some **stress management techniques** can help: time management, saying "no" when you need to, breaking big tasks into smaller ones, etc., so that life's pressures don't pile up to an overwhelming level. Many first-time panic attacks occur during periods of intense prolonged stress. It's as if the body finally sounds an alarm that "something needs to change." Pay attention to that signal. While you can't remove all stress from life, look for what you *can* adjust. Perhaps it's getting more help with childcare, or talking to your boss about workload, or scheduling a regular relaxing activity like a weekly Sabbath hike or nap. Also consider *creative outlets* (writing, music, art) or *journaling* about your feelings as ways to process stress in a healthy way. From a faith



perspective, practicing regular *Sabbath rest and trusting God with your unfinished work* is a profound way to combat the culture of anxiety. It's essentially saying, "God, the world keeps spinning even when I stop. I trust You enough to rest." This not only replenishes you but also increases your faith as you experience God's faithfulness when you step back. In sum, a lifestyle that balances work and rest, includes recreation and relaxation, and manages stress proactively will set a strong foundation for reducing panic attacks.

Adopting these lifestyle habits can make a tangible difference. For example, consider a case of a young man (we'll call him **John**): John had his first panic attack at 28, during a high-pressure period at work. After that scare, he evaluated his routine with the help of a counselor. He realized he was drinking 4 cups of coffee a day, sleeping only 5-6 hours, and hadn't exercised in years. He also carried work stress home every night. Over the next 3 months, John gradually made changes: he cut down to 1 cup of coffee, established a firm 10:30 PM bedtime, started walking for 20 minutes each morning, and began doing a 5-minute breathing/prayer meditation at lunch and before bed. He also took Sundays off from work completely, using that day for church, rest, and family. The results were striking – John went from having **multiple panic episodes a week to zero panic attacks in the last month**, and his daily baseline anxiety dropped dramatically. Quantitatively, on an anxiety self-assessment scale (0-10), he went from averaging around 7/10 anxiety most days to about 2/10 after implementing these lifestyle changes. *"It's like my body isn't on edge all the time now,"* John noted. *"I feel more balanced, and I know God is helping me take better care of myself."* John's experience illustrates what research also confirms: **healthy habits are powerful tools** against anxiety. Of course, every individual is unique – you might not need to change everything at once. But identify one or two areas (like improving sleep or cutting caffeine) and start there. Small steps can lead to big improvements in how you feel. And importantly, view this as part of your spiritual stewardship. Taking care of your body and mind enables you to better *"love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength"* (Mark 12:30), because you'll have the strength and clarity to do so.

Therapeutic and Medical Options (Integrating Faith and Treatment)

Sometimes, despite our best efforts with prayer, faith, and lifestyle, panic attacks may continue or become frequent. This is **not a sign of spiritual failure**; it simply means you might benefit from some additional tools. God has provided wisdom to professionals in psychology and medicine, and utilizing that help is very much in line with a Christian worldview. The Bible itself notes the value of wise counselors (Proverbs 15:22) and effective remedies (Paul advised Timothy to take a medicinal little wine for his stomach in 1 Timothy 5:23). **Seeking therapy or medical treatment for panic attacks is a wise and courageous step**, not a lack of faith. In this section, we'll discuss evidence-based treatments – like psychotherapy and medications – and how they can work alongside your faith.

- **Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT):** The front-line psychological treatment for panic attacks and panic disorder is a form of counseling called **Cognitive Behavioral Therapy**. CBT is a structured, skills-based therapy that helps you identify and change the thought patterns and behaviors that fuel your anxiety. In the context of panic, a CBT therapist will teach you how to reinterpret the scary physical symptoms more realistically (e.g., *"this rapid heartbeat is uncomfortable but not dangerous, it will pass"* instead of *"I'm definitely having a heart attack"*). You'll also learn techniques to confront fears gradually and reduce avoidance. **CBT has an excellent track record for treating panic – it's often called the "gold standard" psychotherapy for panic disorder** ⁴⁷ ⁴⁸. Numerous studies and clinical trials have shown that **CBT can significantly reduce or even eliminate panic attacks in a majority of patients**. For instance, one long-term study found that over 90% of patients with panic

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disorder reported large benefits and improved quality of life after completing a course of CBT, with benefits lasting years after therapy ⁴⁹ ⁵⁰ . In typical cases, a course of CBT for panic might last around 8 to 12 sessions (weekly), though it can vary. Therapists may use techniques like **interoceptive exposure** – gently inducing mild panic sensations in a safe setting to teach you you can handle them – and **breathing retraining, cognitive restructuring, and relaxation skills**. From a faith perspective, many Christians find that CBT's approach resonates with biblical principles about the mind. Paul writes about *"taking every thought captive to make it obedient to Christ"* (2 Corinthians 10:5) and *"be transformed by the renewing of your mind"* (Romans 12:2). In a way, CBT helps you take anxious thoughts captive and renew your thinking about fear. If you have access to a Christian counselor trained in CBT, that can be a great option – they can incorporate prayer and scripture as you work through anxiety. But even a secular therapist can be God's instrument for healing; you can bring your faith into the process by praying for guidance and wisdom as you implement the skills you learn. **Don't hesitate to seek therapy** if panic attacks are recurring – it is not a sign of weak faith but of wise action. As Jesus said, *"It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick"* (Mark 2:17). In principle, reaching out to a mental health professional for panic is like seeing a doctor for a medical issue – it's a step toward healing that God can bless. Many people who complete CBT for panic feel they've gained lifelong tools and often testify they've grown spiritually as well, since they're no longer controlled by fear.

- **Medical Treatment (Medications):** In some cases, medications can play a helpful role in managing panic attacks, either short-term or long-term. There are a few categories of meds commonly used: **antidepressants, anti-anxiety medications, and occasionally beta-blockers**. Antidepressants (particularly **SSRIs and SNRIs**) are actually first-line medications for panic disorder ⁵¹ . Even if you're not depressed, these medications can help stabilize the brain's serotonin or norepinephrine levels and *reduce the frequency and intensity of panic attacks over time* ⁵² . They usually take a few weeks to start working, and you stay on them for a period of months or longer under a doctor's guidance. **Benzodiazepines** (like alprazolam/Xanax or diazepam/Valium) are fast-acting anti-anxiety medications that can *stop a panic attack in its tracks* by quickly calming the nervous system ⁵³ ⁵⁴ . However, they can be habit-forming and are generally prescribed with caution – perhaps as a "rescue" medication or for short-term use while waiting for an SSRI to kick in ⁵⁵ . **Beta-blockers** (like propranolol) aren't traditional anxiety meds, but they can control some of the *physical symptoms* (racing heart, shaking) and are sometimes used in specific situations (e.g., a performer with stage panic might use one) ⁵⁶ . The choice to use medication is personal and should be made with a knowledgeable physician or psychiatrist. As a Christian, you might wrestle with the idea of taking a pill for anxiety – some fear it's a "crutch" or shows lack of faith. It's important to dispel that stigma with truth: if you were diagnosed with diabetes, taking insulin would not indicate a lack of trust in God's healing, it would be using a provision for your health. Similarly, **psychiatric medications can be a gift of God's grace** through medical science, to correct imbalances and give you the stability to apply other coping strategies. There is no biblical prohibition against using medicine. In fact, Proverbs 17:22 says *"a cheerful heart is good medicine,"* implying that medicine (and by analogy anything that promotes health) is something positive. Also, Luke, who authored one of the Gospels and Acts, was a physician by profession (Colossians 4:14), indicating that doctoring and medicine were respected. If a medication helps reduce your panic attacks from say, one a day to virtually none, that frees you to function better and continue to work on deeper healing. Many Christians take SSRIs or other meds for anxiety disorders and thank God for them. It's not an either/or with faith – you can pray for God's healing *and* take medicine, just as you would pray for healing from an infection and also take an antibiotic. One might say, *"Pray as though everything depends on God, and*



medicate (or act) as though everything depends on God working through those means." Use the tools available, and trust that **God is sovereign over the healing process**. If you do take medication, keep committing your progress to the Lord, and ask Him for wisdom for your doctor to find the right medicine and dose for you. Medication is often most effective when combined with therapy, as the medication can stabilize you enough to fully engage in counseling. Ultimately, many people are able to taper off meds after a period of stability, but there's no shame if you need to be on longer-term. As Jesus said, *"It's not the healthy who need a physician"* – it's okay to utilize a physician's help to get healthy.

- **Other Therapies:** While CBT is the most common, there are other therapeutic approaches that can help with panic and anxiety. **Exposure therapy**, often a component of CBT, systematically helps you face feared sensations or situations (for example, intentionally hyperventilating *slightly* to get used to that feeling, or gradually driving a bit further if driving triggered panic) until they no longer trigger extreme fear ⁵⁷. **Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)** is another approach that teaches you to accept panic sensations without judgment and live according to your values despite them. ACT has shown promise in anxiety disorders by changing how you relate to anxious feelings. From a Christian lens, one might see parallels in ACT's approach and biblical acceptance of suffering – learning not to fear fear itself but to move forward trusting God even with discomfort. **Group therapy or support groups** can also be helpful – sharing your experiences with others who understand can reduce the stigma and loneliness of panic. Some churches or Christian counselors offer anxiety support groups which combine prayer, Bible encouragement, and practical skill-building. Additionally, some people explore **biofeedback or neurofeedback** (technologies that teach you to control certain bodily processes), or **relaxation training classes** (like guided meditation, which Christians can adapt by focusing on Scripture or God). There are also self-help resources like workbooks (e.g., the well-regarded "Mastery of Your Anxiety and Panic" workbook ⁴⁴) that you can work through individually or with a coach. **Emerging treatments** like *virtual reality therapy* for exposure, or *TMS (transcranial magnetic stimulation)* for anxiety, are being studied, though those are usually for more severe or refractory cases. The encouraging reality is that **there are many avenues of help**, and success rates are high. Panic disorder is very treatable – the *National Institute of Mental Health* emphasizes that with the right treatment and support, people with panic can *"manage their symptoms and improve their quality of life"* ⁵⁸.

Given these resources, you can approach treatment without fear. If one path doesn't work or feels uncomfortable, another might suit you better. Some Christians prefer first to try counseling and lifestyle changes (since those address root causes and teach coping skills), and use medication as a backup if needed. Others may need medication sooner if their symptoms are overwhelming. There is no one-size-fits-all, and that's okay. **Pray for guidance** as you decide on treatment. Proverbs 3:5-6 comes to mind: *"Trust in the Lord with all your heart... in all your ways submit to Him, and He will make your paths straight."* As you trust God and use the wisdom He provides through professionals, He will direct your path to healing.

One more important note: always **rule out medical causes** for panic-like symptoms. It's wise for first-time panic sufferers to get a checkup – see your primary care doctor to ensure symptoms like rapid heartbeat or shortness of breath aren't stemming from a physical issue (thyroid problems, heart arrhythmias, etc. can sometimes mimic anxiety). In most cases, especially in younger healthy individuals, it truly is panic. But having a doctor evaluate you can give peace of mind. Harvard Health recommends seeing a doctor after a panic episode, both to screen for other conditions and to discuss treatment ⁵⁹. As a Christian, caring for



your health by consulting doctors is perfectly compatible with faith (Luke was called “the beloved physician” for a reason!). So, get that all-clear and then proceed confidently with addressing the panic for what it is.

Finding Hope and Joy Again: A Holistic Perspective

If you’re a Christian struggling with panic attacks, you might be fighting on two fronts: the fear and distress of the attacks themselves, and the guilt or confusion about what it means for your faith. Let’s address that second part clearly: **Experiencing anxiety or panic does NOT mean you lack faith or joy in Christ.** It means you are human living in a fallen world where our bodies and minds sometimes react in broken ways. Many devout believers – including heroes of the faith – have battled anxiety or depression. The 19th-century preacher **Charles Spurgeon**, known as the “Prince of Preachers,” suffered recurring bouts of depression and intense anxiety. Rather than condemning himself, he learned to lean more on God’s grace. He also warned Christians not to judge their anxious brethren harshly. Spurgeon compassionately said, *“Especially judge not the sons and daughters of sorrow... Do not hastily say they ought to be more brave, and exhibit a greater faith. Ask not — ‘why are they so nervous, and so absurdly fearful?’ No... I beseech you, remember that you understand not your fellow man.”* ⁶⁰. In other words, **anxiety is a deep struggle that outsiders may not understand**, and it doesn’t help to simply tell someone to “have more faith.” If you’ve felt any spiritual shame, let it go. The God who loves you is not wagging a finger at you for having a panic attack; rather, He is extending His hand to you to help you out of the pit of fear.

Recall that even Jesus, in His earthly life, experienced emotional agony. In Gethsemane, He said, *“My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death”* and He was in such anguish that His sweat was like blood. Hebrews 4:15 reminds us that *“we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses”* – Jesus sympathizes with us, including in our anxiety. One author noted that Jesus in Gethsemane provides a consoling picture: *“the sympathy of Jesus is the next most precious thing to His sacrifice”* ⁶¹ ⁶². This means when you are panicking, Jesus isn’t far away; He’s right there saying, “I know this feeling, I’ve faced tormenting fear, and I am with you in it.” Because He suffered and conquered, *“He is able to help those who are being tempted [or tested]”* (Hebrews 2:18). So take heart: **Jesus is your empathetic Savior** who understands panic and offers you His hand of peace.

As you employ the various strategies we’ve discussed – immediate coping tools, spiritual disciplines, lifestyle changes, therapy or meds if needed – remember to keep your eyes on the **ultimate source of your peace**: Jesus Christ. He is called the *Prince of Peace* (Isaiah 9:6). One of His promises to His followers is found in John 14:27, *“Peace I leave with you; My peace I give you... Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”* This is not an empty platitude; it’s a real offer. Many Christians can attest that in their darkest moments of anxiety, when they cried out to Jesus, an inexplicable peace would sometimes wash over them – what Philippians 4:7 calls *“the peace of God, which transcends all understanding,”* guarding their hearts and minds. Even if that peace is not instantaneous, know that **His presence is a constant reality**. Sometimes the path to healing from anxiety is gradual, but step by step, *He leads you besides those still waters* (Psalm 23:2) and *restores your soul*.

It’s also important to reclaim the **joy** that panic attacks have tried to steal. Anxiety can make life feel joyless because you’re always dreading the next wave of fear. But Jesus said, *“I have told you these things so that you will be filled with My joy. Yes, your joy will overflow!”* (John 15:11, NLT). Joy, from a Christian standpoint, isn’t just feeling giddy all the time; it’s a deep-seated gladness and hope in God that can exist even alongside difficult emotions. You can experience joy *in spite of* anxiety by clinging to God’s promises and celebrating small victories. Celebrate it when you make it through a panic attack using your tools. Celebrate when you

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manage to do something you avoided before. Gratitude is a powerful ally of joy: each day, try to thank God for a few good things (however small). This practice can gradually shift your focus from what's wrong to what's good, and that in itself reduces anxiety. *"When anxiety was great within me, Your consolation brought me joy,"* the psalmist says (Psalm 94:19). Notice, anxiety and joy are mentioned in the same breath – it's **God's comfort that injected joy** into the situation. Seek His comfort daily. That might be through prayer, His Word, a supportive friend, or even the relief that a good therapy session brings – all these can be channels of God's comfort leading to renewed joy.

In **Romans 8:38-39**, Paul writes, *"For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future... nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."* It's worth adding: neither panic attacks, nor anxiety, nor the chemicals in your brain, nor any diagnosis can separate you from God's love in Christ. Your identity is not "an anxious person" or "a panic sufferer." Your identity is **a beloved child of God**, who happens to be going through an anxiety challenge right now. It's a chapter in your story, not the whole story. With time, effort, and God's grace, this chapter will lead to growth and perhaps even a ministry of helping others. Many people find that once they've walked through anxiety, they become instruments of compassion and comfort for others dealing with similar issues (2 Corinthians 1:4 again!). Who knows how God might redeem this trial.

As you move forward, be patient with yourself. Recovery is seldom a straight line. You might have setbacks – a bad day or even a panic episode after a long calm period. That's okay. It doesn't erase the progress you've made. Just go back to basics: breathe, pray, reach out, and remind yourself this will pass. Each time, you'll get stronger and fear will gradually lose its grip. Keep a long-term perspective: God promised in 2 Timothy 1:7 that He gives us a spirit not of fear but of *power, love, and a sound mind*. So even if your mind doesn't feel sound now, *believe that God is working in you* through all these means to bring you toward that sound mind and heart. As you trust Him and take wise action, you are actively resisting the spirit of fear and embracing the spirit of power and love He provides.

Conclusion:

Your first panic attack may have been one of the most frightening experiences of your life. But it can also be a turning point – a catalyst to seek greater wholeness in body, mind, and spirit. By integrating **solid psychological tools** (like breathing techniques, grounding exercises, and therapy) with the **rich resources of your faith** (prayer, Scripture, community, and trust in God's care), you have a powerful arsenal to combat panic and anxiety. This holistic approach – addressing the physical, mental, and spiritual aspects – reflects the truth that God made us as whole beings and cares about every facet of our well-being. As Jesus said, *"love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength."* In this journey, you are learning to *apply your mind and strength* (through skills and lifestyle changes) while also *leaning in with your heart and soul* (through faith and prayer).

Be encouraged that **help is available and healing is possible**. Many have walked this road before and come out stronger and closer to God on the other side. The storm of panic may roar, but it cannot withstand the One who can say, *"Peace, be still."* Keep your eyes on Jesus, use the wisdom He provides through both spiritual means and scientific knowledge, and take it day by day. You are not defined by your anxiety; you are defined by God's love for you.

In time, as panic fades and peace grows, you will find yourself *"living a joyful life with a deep relationship with Jesus Christ"* once again – perhaps even deeper than before, because you have seen Him deliver you from the valley of fear. *"When anxiety was great within me, Your consolation brought me joy."* (Psalm 94:19). May that



be your testimony. And remember: each small step – each prayer uttered instead of a worry, each night of good rest, each verse clung to, each therapy appointment kept – is a victory in this journey. **You are never alone** in this fight; *“the Lord Himself goes before you and will be with you; He will never leave you nor forsake you”* (Deuteronomy 31:8). Take His hand, take a deep breath, and step forward into freedom. The peace of Christ be with you always.

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