

Anxiety & the Power of Why

■ by Vanessa Cruz, MA, LPC



You may have experienced it while driving, working, or even doing laundry. Some women even report that it's most present when they are doing their hair and makeup. Your heart rate begins to increase, and along with the force of each beat, your body begins to prepare itself for danger or harm - except you aren't in any real danger or harm. In fact, you might just be standing in line at the grocery store or running a normal routine errand. What do you do when this happens? Do you reach for your phone? Do you turn on music or the T.V. for background noise?

Distraction is Short Lived

Determining your normal response to anxiety of any kind is not only helpful, but a necessary ingredient to help you identify and cope with the root of your particular anxiety. However, our normal response to anxiety is usually to brush it off, distract ourselves or simply ignore it. While this helps for the time being, it's typically short lived. So how do we effectively manage anxiety, worry or fear and not let it manage us?

The Power of Why

I find that the simple yet powerful question of "why?" works wonders. In scripture we find a great example of a psalmist who finds himself down and depressed and put's to use the power of the "why". Let's take a look at his self dialogue or self-talk.

Why, my soul, are you downcast?

Why so disturbed within me?

Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.

*My soul is downcast within me; therefore I will remember you from the land of the Jordan,
the heights of Hermon—from Mount Mizar.*

Psalm 42:5-6 NIV (emphasis mine)

We find that in the midst of his depression, the psalmist has a moment of self-reflection and poses a question to himself. Something like, "Hey, what's all this sadness about?" Only in that moment of self-awareness does it become possible to speak truth to those feelings. He says to himself, "Put your hope in God, praise him!" He declares to himself, "God is your Savior, remember who he really is!"

- Continued on Page 2 -

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Continued from Page 1

PRR – Pause, Reflect, Reframe

When you take a moment to self-reflect on your anxiousness and say to yourself, “What’s this about?” you might find some answers. They may sound like, “I feel overwhelmed by my list of things to do,” “What will they think of me?” or “I’m worried about direction for my life.”



When we take the time to untangle what may seem like a ball of emotions, most times the simple solution is this - Trust in the Lord. Easier said than done, right? Here is an easy acronym to help you get to the root of what is bothering you: PRR. Think of an adorable cat when really relaxed, they “prrr”. We want to be that relaxed too, so to get there we must:

- **Pause** - Since our thoughts tend to be automatic, the first thing we must learn to do is “catch” our thoughts. As soon as you sense your normal signs of anxiety, i.e, tense body, elevated heart rate, sweaty palms, pause and then *reflect*.
- **Reflect** - Ask yourself what you were just thinking about or what event triggered fear and/or anxiety. After you’ve identified those pesky fears or worries, *reframe*.
- **Reframe** - After you’ve identified the cause(s) of your “stinking thinking,” it’s time to take charge! Speak truth to those thoughts by doing as the psalmist did. Find a verse or scripture that typically helps bring you hope and remind yourself that your hope is in God.

Replace Fear with Freedom

For this technique to have lasting effects, PRR must become a way of life. Every day the world around us, people around us, even our own selves have a way of creating fear or lies that we unintentionally believe. Becoming an active participant in our thought life helps us maintain our freedom. Also, remember to jot down the worries or fears that seem to be making a regular appearance. Pray over them, and if you are in therapy, make sure to bring them to your next session to talk over with your therapist. You are well on your way toward freedom! ■

*It is for freedom that Christ has set us free.
Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.*
Galatians 5:1



Vanessa Cruz, MA, is a Licensed Professional Counselor and sees clients in our Chicago (North Park), IL location.

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