



■ by Laura Goossens, MSW, LCSW

As the pandemic unfolded, so did a two-fold anxiety: anxiety over contracting the virus, and anxiety over giving it to someone else. Since the pandemic started, I had become very sensitive to articles and new stories about the horrors of the virus. I started to notice a defensiveness about it all inside me and was always pushing for discussions over the progress we had made and the hope that could be found. It's not that I was naïve or hadn't been taking it seriously, so I wondered where this defensiveness was coming from.

One day in the midst of a feisty discussion with a friend over COVID, my defenses finally broke, and I realized that, underneath it all, there was immense guilt and worry over giving the virus to a loved one without knowing it. I had been working throughout the entire pandemic and have loved ones with health conditions, and there was this heavy weight upon me to protect them. I constantly feared the worst: What if my scratchy throat was secretly COVID? What if I was exposed at work and had no idea? What if....

### Communication of Our Fears

I believe one of the most important ways we can deal with the anxiety of infecting a loved one with COVID is to communicate our fears to our loved ones. As hard as these conversations are to have, I believe they are so important. In the beginning of the pandemic, I did my best to keep my mom from coming over. She was upset and didn't understand why, until I finally communicated that I was afraid of putting her at risk. She confidently told me that seeing me and her grandchildren was well worth any risk there was. There was a peace within her about it, which then gave me peace also. I was still going to be as careful as possible and do my part to try not to get the virus, but it helped to know that we were on the same page and I wasn't putting a risk on her that she wasn't already accepting of. If I had never taken the opportunity to communicate my fears, I would never have been able to receive the peace my mom had given me.

### Communication of Expectations

Another way to help deal with the anxiety of giving COVID to someone you love is having a discussion of the expectations that you both have. If you are choosing to see the people in your circle, you should be on the same page as much as possible. Do we wear masks when we see each other? Do we tell each other every time either of us has a sniffle? Do we wait a certain number of days to see each other if either of us has done something that puts us at a greater risk? You can't assume you both feel the same way about any of these issues, but you need to take the time to communicate where you both stand and what expectations you have for each other if you are part of each other's lives. There are lots of different views and opinions, but discussing expectations and having a common respect for one another can ease the anxiety of possibly exposing each other to the virus. We have such an opportunity to show Christ's love when we choose to make decisions that go out of our way to sacrifice our own comforts to protect others. There will be people in our lives that have a greater risk of being affected by the virus than we might be, and we should always be looking for ways to decrease the risk we might cause them and keep their needs in mind with the decisions we make.

### Control What You Can, Let Go of What You Can't

"Control what you can, and let go of what you can't" has been a phrase I have said over and over to myself during this pandemic. Controlling what you can could look like taking precautions, such as social distancing, washing your hands more, and getting creative to find ways to decrease the risk of infection when around others. These precautions could also mean being upfront about any symptoms you might have and quarantining for the appropriate time you are instructed to. Controlling what you can could look like wearing a mask in times when you believe it's necessary and in times when you might not believe it's necessary but are around someone else who could be directly affected by your choices. We should always be aware of how we can minimize the risk we are causing for those around us. We will never regret being overcautious in our consideration of others.

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# How Do I Deal With the Anxiety of Infecting a Loved One With COVID?

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Let go of what you can't control. God is the one in control; he knows the plans he has for us, and no matter how hard we try to control things, it's simply never in our control. Matthew 6:25-27 says, "That is why I tell you not to worry about everyday life—whether you have enough food and drink, or enough clothes to wear. Isn't life more than food, and your body more than clothing? Look at the birds. They don't plant or harvest or store food in barns, for your heavenly Father feeds them. And aren't you far more valuable to him than they are? Can all your worries add a single moment to your life?" God isn't surprised by this pandemic; it's all in His plan. This doesn't mean that it will be an easy road. It might be a difficult season of life, one of trials and struggles. Yet when we commit our mindset to "Thy will be done" and trust that he will never leave us or forsake us no matter what we face, there is peace.

## Pray and Read God's Word

Praying and reading the Bible might sound like the cliché answer to anxiety, but there is so much power in it. I have prayed and read my Bible more in the past six months than I had in a long time, and it has changed me. Philippians 4:6 says, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God." When I talk to God, vent my worries, and pray His will be done, I find peace. When I am before the God of the universe—the one who made every star in the sky and yet knows every hair on my head—I am reminded how much bigger God is than all of this. Suddenly I am aware that there is a much bigger picture to this all, and in this moment in time I am just a small speck of it. When I read my Bible, I see God's faithfulness time and time again. When I see the bravery of believers before me who have obeyed God in the times of confusion and chaos, I am encouraged to be brave and seek to obey God in all of this also. God's Word reminds me that I am far from alone, and in these times of isolation and confusion, I need this reminder more than ever.

## Forgiveness

What if you make mistakes, and it's your fault that you infect someone? There is forgiveness there. This could mean you downplayed symptoms you were having because you needed to go to work or wanted to be at a social event. Or maybe you didn't quarantine the full amount of time because you were stir-crazy and decided to go out anyway. Or you could have failed to mention the fact that you were recently exposed and spent time with others who later ended up becoming infected. There are many areas we can sin as we continue to wrestle through this pandemic. "For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). We are all sinners and will make mistakes, and when we lay down our pride and admit our wrong, God will always forgive. "But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all wickedness" (1 John 1:9). After we confess our sin to God and others, we need to repent, turn from our sin, and commit to walking in the right direction again. There may be consequences we have to face because of our sin, but God's grace means we can move on without shame, because he carried all of our guilt to the cross. God's grace means we can find peace again.

## The Heart of Your Anxiety

The truth is, if you are feeling anxious over giving a loved one the virus, most likely it means that you are trying to consider their needs before your own. "Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves" (Philippians 2:3). Your heart is in the right place, and you are looking out for the welfare of others instead of just your own. I believe, at the center of this all, that is truly a beautiful thing and is showing the nature of Jesus. Yet, in this concern, we can't allow anxiety to take over, and we need to pray and seek full surrender to the will of God. When we work toward resting in the will of God, we will find peace in a time when the world is telling us there is none to be found. ■

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