

The Anxiety Prayer | By Kyle Welch

Ever since I was a kid, I've dealt with anxiety. I used to get stomachaches because of it. All the time, I'd fixate on everything that could go wrong. I'd think about it over and over and over.

I'm much better today, not so hampered by anxiety and worry as much as I used to be. But it does arise from time to time. I'll wake up in the middle of the night for no reason and think about the work I need to do and this and that and the other thing, and the cycle fuels itself as I toss and turn.

There's a prayer I've cobbled together over time from various sources that I pray when I'm feeling anxious or worried and I can't get my mind off of it. In those moments, when I can't shut everything off and when I feel like I'm spinning out of control, I'll go through the steps of this prayer and then find I can go back to sleep.

It isn't an ancient spiritual practice or some strange alignment of mind, body and spirit that allows us to ascend to a different level of heaven. And it isn't a fail-safe, always-works process that will always take your anxiety away.

Nothing like that exists.

It's just a simple prayer of thankfulness to God. Here's what I do:

(1) Close my eyes, breathe and find my heartbeat. I know, I know, this is already sounding New Age-y. But I think too often we dive into prayer in an effort to get it over as quickly as possible. To be honest, I am not entirely sure why we do that. Prayer is a wonderful place to be.

So, when I start, I try to shut out as much external noise as possible. Finding your heartbeat helps there, too.

Either put your hands on your heart or find your pulse on your wrist or plug your ears to hear your heart beating.

(2) Thank God for your heart and the blood that runs in your veins. The human heart is a miracle. It pumps blood through miles of arteries and veins. The fact that we are even alive is a gift from God. When I begin, I thank God for the life He has given me.

(3) Thank God for at least three gifts He has given to you. This is the key part. This is the secret in the sauce.

I focus on a memory, something for which I'm thankful. I relive that memory as best as I can, seeing what I saw and hearing what I heard back then. When I come to the end of that memory, I thank God for that gift, and then I move on to another memory.

The key is thankfulness. At least, that's what I glean from Philippians 4:6,

*⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, **with thanksgiving**, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the **peace of God**, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

The goal of this prayer is to find peace, the opposite of anxiety and worry.

Sometimes I wonder if people even know what I'm talking about when I speak of peace. I'll bring up the idea and get a ton of blank stares in response.

But when you experience a few moments of focused gratitude to God and find the capacity to approach whatever is worrying you with a quiet confidence and stillness in your soul, then you'll know what peace is.

That's a peace that only comes from God.

(4) Wander into the good. This last part is usually where I drop the ball. When I start the prayer, I'll do the breathing and then I'll pray this thankfulness prayer and then sometimes I'll find that I'm right back into worrying again and that I've achieved nothing. After Paul wrote Philippians 4:6-7, he kept writing...

⁸ Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.

After the prayer, it is good to reflect on something noble or right or pure, like Paul says. Sometimes, I'll think about a story or a verse I've read from Scripture. Or I'll think about a quote I've heard from a hero I admire. Or I'll reflect on a memory where I saw someone doing an admirable thing. Or any number of good things that God would like.

As I said earlier, this isn't a magical self-help formula for conquering your anxiety. Anyone who gives you that line is probably selling something. It's just a prayer.

But the reason why I think this one is awesome is because it takes your mind off of everything that's wrong and places it on everything that's right.

Because let's be honest: Most of the stuff that's wrong in your life won't matter in eternity anyway. But everything that's right—every beautiful and intangible thing God has given you in this Christian life—will decorate the halls of heaven.

Think about that stuff. That's the stuff that matters.