



When the 'What-Ifs' Are Overwhelming

Three Simple Practices for Anxiety in Uncertain Times

by LuAnn Roberson

When life feels uncertain, it is natural to get caught up in thinking through “*what-if*” scenarios. When we come down with a bad case of the “*what-ifs*,” anxiety levels escalate, and mental energy and coping skills can quickly become ineffective.

With higher anxiety, the need for simple coping strategies is essential. Perhaps the following practices from NICABM* and God’s Word will be helpful for you personally, and also for those in your sphere of influence. Please share!

The first strategy is: **WHAT IF...? ➡ THEN WHAT?**

When you notice that your thoughts seem to be centered in the what-ifs, choose one or two that are causing the most anxiety. Speak or write out the concern. To name something properly is the first step in bringing peace of mind. Let your ‘what-if’ be honestly shared with God.

Here’s an example: “*What if I get sick?*”

After you speak your “What-if,” it’s time for a simple plan--“Then What?” specific to you. Come up with a short bullet point plan for what you will do if your “what-if” actually happens.

- I will isolate myself from contact with others until I am evaluated.
- Following the guidelines, I will determine if my symptoms are severe enough to warrant a call to the doctor. (Fever? Cough? Shortness of breath?)
- I will continue to drink lots of water, eat well, and rest.

Naming your concern, then coming up with a potential plan for action, can decrease anxiety levels. Once the plan is created, it can be put aside in your mind for use if necessary, but it doesn’t need to consume your thoughts and escalate your anxiety.

“...let your requests be made known to God... and the peace of God...will guard your heart and your mind in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4:6-7

A second strategy example: **ONE DAY AT A TIME!**

Ask yourself, “*What is important for today? What is vital for this next hour? What is my next right thing to do?*”

Staying present in the moment can help you be focused and available to yourself and others in a more intentional way, and less anxious about things in the future that are out of your control.

“... tomorrow has enough trouble of its own.” Matthew 6:34

A third strategy to practice: **COMPASSIONATE ACTION**

Anxiety can quickly draw you inward into isolation, so choosing to focus outwardly on small kind acts of compassion may help decrease your anxiety and contribute to building a community of support for you and others.

“...serve one another humbly in love.” Galatians 5:13

May these simple practices be useful as you navigate with God the feelings of anxiety that can be present during times of uncertainty and change.

*NICABM National Institute for Clinical Application of Behavioral Medicine, Ruth Buczynski, Ph.D. www.nicabm.com

—Holy Bible NIV, NASB versions