

**Helping Parents Help Their Anxious Child Trust in The Good Shepherd**

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## Abstract

Title: Helping Parents Help Their Anxious Child Trust in the Good Shepherd  
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There are many events, both real and imagined, that can reveal anxiety in a child. The pressures and temptations of social media create an atmosphere of doubt, anguish, or concern. An unsettled home life can give way to threatening worries of ongoing uncertainty. Painful, frightening, and traumatic experiences in a child's short past can expose anxiety in her heart. Secular therapists would utilize empirical and experiential data to calculate the severity and extent of damage caused by these traumatic experiences. They then offer a disease-based methodology which sees mindfulness or medication as the best solution. Biblical counselors are equipped with the infallible Word of God that is sufficient to address the heart of a child and all the struggles she may be experiencing.

Secular therapists use diagnostic tools scale to help determine the risk factors in a child's life that have played into negative outcomes in the mental and physical condition.<sup>1</sup> The anxious child may have controlling fears or worry about situations far outside of her control. She might be unable to concentrate on school work and make poor relationship choices. This paper will help biblical counselors and church laity to understand the heart issues that may be developing in children and then answer those issues with the living and active Word of God which can discern and transform an anxious heart into one of trust and peace (Heb. 4:12; 2 Tim. 3:16; Phil. 4:6-7). Using the imagery of the good shepherd found in the Scripture, biblical counseling with parents can equip them to counsel their child. Children are never too young to be taught how to trust in Christ and overcome anxiety in their lives. Biblical counselors can help parents develop skills and tools in helping these children have hope.

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1. Melissa A. Louvar Reeves, *Trauma and Childhood Adverse Experiences*, Chattanooga, TN: National Center for Youth Issues, 2020, 5-6.

## I. Introduction

### A. Relevance and Significance

1. For the out-reach minded church, children's programs are attended by those who bear the impact of traumatic experiences within their homes.
2. Even families within our local church bodies have children who may exhibit an anxious heart. Counselors within the church need to be apprised of what the secular culture is defining as adverse childhood experiences and we need to be equipped to biblically provide hope and help for anxious children impacted by them.
3. The ever-pervasive, ever-increasing presence of social media in the lives of children today presents fuel and fodder for anxiety in a child's heart. Children do not have the resources and maturity to handle pressures, albeit often artificial, that many social media activities/relationships present.
4. Anxiety is seen often in children who have had traumatic experiences. Children are never too young to be taught how to trust in Christ and overcome anxiety in their lives. Biblical counselors can help parents develop skills and tools in helping their believing children have hope.
5. The struggles, desire, and hope for children is just like those of adults and counselors who help adults can help children.<sup>2</sup> It is to these children

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2. Amy Baker, "Introduction to Counseling Children", (Association of Biblical Counselors, August 12, 2020), <https://biblicalcounseling.com/resource-library/conference-messages/introduction-to-counseling-children/>.

struggling with anxiety that Scripture speaks and provides all they need for facing the trauma of this life and bringing God glory in their response.

## B. Research Methodology

1. In order to fully grasp what childhood trauma is defined as in psychology and in biblical terms, I will employ a methodology of library research, internet/video observation, and personal interviews with secular clinicians and Christian counselors.
2. The sources of my research from books include those with a biblical perspective on past experiences and secular approaches to trauma.
3. My contact with secular therapists will be through Family and Children Services of Tulsa and I will have personal interviews with Crossroads Counseling, a Christian counseling center. These two centers use a secular therapeutic methodology and treat both children and adults.

## C. Limitations and Scope

1. The intended audience for this research will be biblical counselors and lay ministers of the Word of God who desire to bring the Gospel and truth of Scripture to the parents of a child who is struggling with anxiety. I intend for this information to be used by those serving in the local church's children's programs and para church ministries.
2. I also hope that parents can benefit from a biblical approach to what their foster/adoptive child may have experienced prior to joining their home.
3. By researching and recognizing the secular model of diagnosis and therapeutic treatment for childhood anxiety, I will try to encourage parents

in seeking to instill in their child the biblical process of change rather than the worldly approach to their child's struggles.

4. I plan to use the imagery of the Good Shepherd given in Scripture for God the Father and God the Son to show parents how they can bring biblical hope to their child.

#### D. Assumptions

1. This research will be conducted from an avowedly biblical perspective. The starting point is the total sufficiency and inerrancy of Scripture for all of life (Heb. 4:12-13; 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Peter 1:3). Everything regarding the care of the soul of man can be addressed and resolved from the Word of God. God's written Word, the Bible, is the authority for all life and the final word for all relationships.
2. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the only pathway for true, lasting, transformation in the life of a believer (2 Cor. 5:17, 21, Gal. 2:20). It is also assumed that God gives common grace to all mankind, all those that bear His image. This grace allows that those who deny God's existence or authority may still discover and offer valuable observations into the responses and behavior of people.
3. Scripture gives parents the final human authority in the life of their children and the ultimate human responsibility for care, training, and spiritual instruction (Deut. 6:4-9; Eph. 6:4; Ps. 127:3-5).

#### E. Definition of Terminology

1. Secular Definitions

- a. Anxiety is considered a mental disorder by the psychiatric and psychology community. It is given a medical diagnosis and treatment in adults and in children.
- b. According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual – 5<sup>th</sup> Edition, anxiety disorder is defined as having the “features of excessive fear and anxiety and related behavioral disturbances.”<sup>3</sup>
- c. Anxiety is the emotional response to an anticipated future threat or danger and fear is the emotional response to a real or perceived imminent threat.<sup>4</sup>
- d. “Anxiety disorders differ from developmentally normative fear or anxiety by being excessive or persisting beyond developmentally appropriate periods.”<sup>5</sup>
- e. Anxiety in children can be differentiated in diagnoses.
  - a. Separation anxiety disorder
  - b. Generalized anxiety disorder
  - c. Panic disorder
  - d. Agoraphobia
  - e. Social anxiety disorder
  - f. Post-traumatic stress disorder
  - g. Illness anxiety disorder

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3. Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders – 5<sup>th</sup> ed., (Washington D.C.: American Psychiatric Publishing, 2013), 189.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

- h. Bereavement
- i. Depressive and bipolar disorders
- j. Oppositional defiance disorder
- k. Psychotic disorders
- l. Personality disorders<sup>6</sup>

## 2. Biblical Definitions

- a. “The Bible distinguishes between godly concern and ungodly anxiety and fear. Godly concern is focused on others and on God’s glory. Ungodly fear/anxiety focuses on what might happen to you without consideration of the love, wisdom, and sovereign power of God.”<sup>7</sup>
- b. Anxiety is to be avoided, resisted, put off, and replaced (Matt. 6:25-24; Luke 12:25-26; Phil. 4:6-8; 1 Peter 5:7). The Greek word for “anxious” is “merimnos” and means to be anxious about, to worry, be concerned.<sup>8</sup>

## II. Definition of the Problem

This section will be devoted to defining the problem of anxiety in children and gaining a deeper understanding of the secular definition and biblical view.

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6. Ibid., 194-195.

7. Marshal and Mary Asher, *The Christian’s Guide to Psychological Terms*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (Bemidji, MN: Focus Publishing, 2014, 2004), 14.

8. James Swanson, [\*Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek \(New Testament\)\*](#) (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

## A. The Secular View

1. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-5), states that the prevalence of anxiety varies depending on the specific type. Selective mutism (choosing when to speak) ranges below 1% and specific phobias can affect up to 16% of the adolescent population in the United States.<sup>9</sup> Other types of anxiety fall within this range.
2. Although it is difficult to know precisely, it is estimated that 10 to 15 percent of American children meet the diagnostic criteria for an anxiety disorder, making it the number one class of “pediatric emotional disorder.”<sup>10</sup>
3. “In children, the fear or anxiety may be expressed by crying, tantrums, freezing or clinging.”<sup>11</sup> Anxiety often will involve some type of avoidance and affects the child in three ways.
  - a. Mental processes or thoughts are affected by the child centering all thoughts around a particular perceived danger or threat.
  - b. Physical issues develop such as rapid heart rate, increased breathing, sweating, sleeplessness, and nausea.
  - c. Behavior troubles arise out of avoidance of activity deemed dangerous.<sup>12</sup>

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9. Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders – 5<sup>th</sup> ed., (Washington D.C.: American Psychiatric Publishing, 2013), 189 – 199.

10. Paul Foxman, *The Worried Child: Recognizing Anxiety in Children and Helping Them Heal* (Alameda, CA: Hunter House Publisher, 2004), 2.

11. *Ibid.*, 197.

12. Ronald M. Rapee, Ann Wignall, Susan H. Spence, Vanessa Cobham, Heidi Lyneham, *Helping Your Anxious Child -A Step-by-Step Guide for Parents*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications, 2008), 20.

4. Fears are considered a normal part of life and it is difficult to determine if a child's anxiety is 'normal'.<sup>13</sup> Parents can evaluate if their child's fear and anxiety is a problem for the child and "interferes with or cause difficulties for" the child.<sup>14</sup> It is suggested that a better way to consider a child's problem with anxiety is to recognize that all children have some level of anxiety and the determination comes at the intensity that is "adversely affecting his or her life."<sup>15</sup>
5. Shyness plays into an anxious child's life and may limit the number of friends he or she has.<sup>16</sup> A child's academic performance may be affected as an anxious child might underachieve in presentations, avoid question asking, or be unable to concentrate.<sup>17</sup>
6. The secular view would say that no one knows why children are anxious but there are several factors "that might cause or at least keep anxiety going in children."<sup>18</sup>
  - a. Genes can be the source of anxiety in children as emotional sensitivity, according to secular research, can be passed on from parent to child.

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13. Ibid., 16-17.

14. Ibid., 17.

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid., 18.

17. Ibid., 19.

18. Ibid., 28.

- b. Negative thoughts that are repeated after or between troubling events are seen as fuel for anxiety in a child.
- c. Avoiding a fearful or potentially threatening situation or environment keeps anxiety alive in a child.
- d. Parent reaction to a child's anxiety may itself be a catalyst for more anxious thoughts and behaviors.
- e. Parent modeling provides a framework by which children create their own methods of dealing with anxious feelings.
- f. Stressors considered normal in a child's life may prove to be extreme events for a child that is considered already sensitive and anxious.<sup>19</sup>

#### B. The Biblical View

1. The gospel and hope of transformation through salvation in Christ is the same for children as for adults. "The Bible offers that same gospel to adults and children alike, and in fact urges us to come to God like little children."<sup>20</sup> All children, as well as adults, must be called to repentance and faith in Jesus and this repentance is a turning away from sin.
2. Children are a gift from God to parents (Ps. 127:3) and God delights in the praise of children (Ps. 8:2). Jesus welcomes children and declared that His kingdom belongs to those who had faith as they (Matt. 19:13-15).
3. Sins are the same for children as they are for adults and anxiety is clearly forbidden in Scripture (Matt. 6:25; Phil. 4:6; 1 Peter 5:6-7).

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19. Ibid., 29-31.

20. Marty Machowski, "Leading Children to Jesus", in *Caring for the Souls of Children: A Biblical Counselor's Manual*, ed. Amy Baker (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2020), 56.

4. Anxiety has a negative influence on the body and the soul (Prov. 12:25, 14:30, 17:22). Even if a child has inherited a genetic trait from a parent or is copying behavior of a parent, this does not determine the child's response and spiritual growth.
5. Fear and anxiety can be a warning sign that something is wrong and we need to take action.<sup>21</sup> A physical response to actual danger is God's gift to allow us to respond appropriately to peril but the body (brain included) cannot tell the difference between real and imagined danger.<sup>22</sup> From a past experience or imagined fear, a child may develop anxiety over an event that may not be a reality. "Such strange creatures are we that we probably smart more under blows which never fall upon us than we do under those which do actually come. The rod of God does not smite us as sharply as the rod of our own imagination does; our groundless fears are our chief tormentors."<sup>23</sup>
6. Anxiety and worry are sinful because trust of a future event is transferred from God to self – "the problem is not with your brain; it's with the imaginations of the mind that are spawning your brain's responses."<sup>24</sup>

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21. Elyse Fitzpatrick and Laura Hendrickson, M.D., *Will Medicine Stop the Pain? : Finding God's Healing for Depression, Anxiety, & Other Troubling Emotions*, (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 2006), 121.

22. *Ibid.*, 123.

23. Charles H. Spurgeon, "Needless Fears", (sermon, Metropolitan Tabernacle Newington, delivered on June 11, 1874, published June 25, 1908), accessed October 25, 2021, <http://www.spurgeongems.org/sermon/chs3098.pdf>, 2.

24. Fitzpatrick, 123.

Children struggle with anxiety because they are actually using their God-given ability to imagine a certain event or situation in their heart in the wrong way.<sup>25</sup>

7. Children are designed uniquely and fearfully and wonderfully made by God (Ps. 139:13-16) and they may vary in their response to stress and danger. They all have different strengths and weaknesses and different temptations and struggles as some will tend to be more fearful and anxious. “They are more alert to potential risks and are in tune with the peril others are experiencing. This creates a heightened sense of vulnerability for them.”<sup>26</sup>

### III. Research

#### A. The Secular Model

1. According to the DSM-5, a child is diagnosed as having an anxiety disorder if “the fear, anxiety, or avoidance is persistent, lasting at least 4 weeks in children and adolescents.”<sup>27</sup> Observations and self-reporting symptoms by children or parents that “the disturbance causes clinically significant distress or impairment in social, academic, occupational, or other important areas of functioning.”<sup>28</sup>

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25. Ibid.

26. Julie Lowe, *Helping Your Anxious Child: What to do When Worries Get Big* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2018), 5.

27. DSM-5, 191.

28. Ibid.

2. Research can come in the form of studies done to determine the relationship between certain activities and anxiety in children. A study in the Canadian Journal of Psychiatry measured the effect of screen time on a group of seventh graders over the course of four years.<sup>29</sup> This study showed a marked increase in anxiety symptoms for children as their usage of screen time increased.<sup>30</sup> These symptoms were measured in the same way as the DSM-5 presents criteria. “Technology-based negative social comparison, anxiety resulting from lack of emotion-regulation skills” and “worries about being inadequately connected” are seen as causes of an increase in anxiety in children.<sup>31</sup>
3. Most often, solutions for the anxious child from the secular world is in the form of medications and cognitive behavioral therapy.<sup>32</sup> And, the recommended medication of choice is serotonin reuptake inhibitors, or antidepressants.<sup>33</sup>
4. Like cognitive behavioral therapy, mindfulness is a practice that is prescribed for the anxious child for noticing the “here and now” letting “thoughts begin to settle” and clearing her mind.<sup>34</sup> These thoughts are centered on developing

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29. Elroy Boers, Mohammad H. Afzali, and Patricia Conrod, “Temporal Associations of Screen Time and Anxiety Symptoms Among Adolescents”, *The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, November 4, 2019, accessed October 31, 2021, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0706743719885486>.

30. Ibid.

31. Elizabeth Hoge, David Bickham, Joanne Cantor, “Digital Media, Anxiety, and Depression in Children”, *Pediatrics*, November 2017, accessed October 31, 2021, [https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/140/Supplement\\_2/S76](https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/140/Supplement_2/S76).

32. Jerry Bublick PhD, “What is the Best Treatment for Anxiety?”, *Child Mind Institute*, accessed October 31, 2021, <https://childmind.org/article/behavioral-treatment-kids-anxiety/>.

33. John D. Walkup, MD, “Best Medications for Kids with Anxiety”, *Child Mind Institute*, accessed October 31, 2021, <https://childmind.org/article/best-medications-for-kids-anxiety/>.

an awareness of being only in the moment and calling upon inner strength, self-affirmation, directed breathing, and guided meditation; “no right or wrong answer.”<sup>35</sup>

## B. The Biblical Model

1. The Old Testament is replete with admonitions concerning anxiety. The prophet Isaiah speaks for God to His people when he pens “Do not anxiously look about you” (Is. 41:10). Undergirding all that is the command to a life free of worry is the promise of God’s continual presence and His work on behalf of His people.
  - a. God’s presence is spoken of in numerous passages in which the Lord commends His people to live free of anxious care. He wants them to know of His abiding with them so that whatever cares that they face may be kept in the perspective of His omnipresence. These verses remind His people of the command to fear not coupled with the security of God’s promise to be with us (Gen. 26:24, 28:15; Deut. 20:1, 31:6, 8; Joshua 1:9; Is. 43:2, 5, 44:2).
  - b. God also commands His people to lay aside anxiety with a grasp of His promises of the works He will do on their behalf. These works give the assurance of His hand upon them to keep them, prosper them, give them victory, salvation, help, and redemption (Gen. 15:1 28:15; Deut. 3:22; Ps. 27:1; Is. 35:4, 41:13-14, 44:2; Jer. 30:10, 46:27).

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34. Susan Verde, *I Am Peace* (New York: Abrams Books, 2017), 8-9.

35. *Ibid.*, 30.

- c. Proverbs speaks to the weight of anxiety and the remedy that is found in a good word (Pr. 12:25). Anxiety is destructive and burdens the body as well as the soul.
2. The New Testament also states the negative command against anxiety and worry. It is a prohibition to what our culture today deems as simply a disorder or troubling emotion. “But when Jesus (or Paul or Peter, who were writing under divine inspiration) says to us, “Don’t be anxious,” it has the force of a moral command. In other words, it is the moral will of God that we not be anxious. Or to say it more explicitly, it is sin.”<sup>36</sup>
    - a. God’s prohibits worry and anxiety by giving a negative command throughout the New Testament. He forbids being anxious for basic necessities of life (Matt. 6:25-34) where Jesus uses the word anxious six times in those few verses. This is repeated with the same Greek word (merimnao) in Luke 12:22-26. Paul tells the Philippian believers that they need not be anxious about anything at all because “the Lord is near” (Phil. 4:5-6).
    - b. As in the Old Testament, God’s promised provision, presence, and protection are offered as reasons to never worry or be anxious. Various forms of creation are used to illustrate God’s sovereign and loving care so that man, made in His image, might fully grasp His complete care for him. Jesus uses birds,

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36. Jerry Bridges, *Respectable Sins* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2007), 58.

(Matt. 6:26, Luke 12:24; Matt. 10:29, Luke 12:6) flowers, and grass (Matt. 6:28-30; Luke 12:27). God promises to protect His own and again this is reason to not worry even when facing death (Matt. 10:28; Luke 12:4-5; Rom. 8:38-39; 1 Pet. 3:14; Rev. 2:10).

- c. A distrust of God and His provision is sin and this is exactly what anxiety is.<sup>37</sup> Anxiety is unbelief: “a lack of acceptance of God’s providence in our lives. God’s providence may be simply defined as God’s orchestrating all circumstances and events in His universe for His glory and the good of His people.”<sup>38</sup>

#### IV. Biblical and Theological Considerations in Counseling Parents with Anxious Children

##### A. Counseling Parents to Counsel their Children

1. The best way to counsel a child is to counsel her believing parents. Parents are called to train their children and raise them in the ways of the Lord. “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4). The Greek word for discipline (paideia) used here is “a broad term that encompasses some sort of structured guidance and restrain, whether by practical guidelines for living, encouragement, reproof, or chastisement.”<sup>39</sup>

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37. Ibid.

38. Ibid., 58-59.

39. Martha Peace and Stuart Scott, *The Faithful Parent* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2010), 9.

2. God has given parents the unique responsibility of stewarding their children's spiritual life (Deut. 6:1-2, 6-9; Prov. 2:1-5, 3:1-2, 4:10-11, 13, 6:20-22; 29:15, 17). Parents are to instruct and discipline but salvation is a work of God alone (Rom. 8:30). "If the parent taught as God would have him teach, and if the child would receive as God would have him take it to heart, the result would be a child with a real and growing relationship to God."<sup>40</sup>

3. Biblical counselors can come along side parents and show them the wonderful truths of the inerrant Word of God and allow them to give their children the hope that Scripture alone offers. The discipleship relationship that grows between counselor and parent can be transferred to parent and child. There may be times when a child receives counseling from a biblical counselor outside of the family, but believing parents are the in the best position to counsel their own children.

#### B. The Character of God in Counseling Anxiety

1. The sovereignty of God is perhaps the most crucial in allowing a child to understand the foundation for trust and hope in the midst of anxiety. Having a deep understanding and true foundation of the complete control of God over all of life undergirds the basis for counseling anxiety. God is able to do what He wants (Job 42:2; Ps. 115:3; Is. 14:27; Is. 43:13; Is. 46:10; Dan. 4:35; Eph. 1:11) and "God does as He pleases, only as He pleases, and works out every event to bring about the accomplishment of His will."<sup>41</sup> A child must rest in the overarching

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40. Dan Phillips, *God's Wisdom in Proverbs* (The Woodlands, TX: Kress Biblical Resources, 2011), 253.

41. Jerry Bridges, *Trusting God* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1988), 45.

control that God has on her life and parents must model and instruct this for their child.

2. Parents must be ready and able to teach their child about God's supreme power, His omnipotence. Omnipotence can be understood as God's power to do anything consistent with his nature<sup>42</sup> and power to do all within his holy will.<sup>43</sup> This perfection provides believers with the comfort that all events and circumstances are under God's loving control and he can provide all we need (Ps. 24:8; Eph. 3:20; Jer. 32:27). This power can be taught to a child in many ways and parents can help their children see and hope in the power of the almighty God (Jer. 14:22).

3. A third attribute of God that is imperative for children to grasp when they are struggling with anxiety is His love. God's love is everlasting (Jer. 31:3). His love is unfailing (Ps. 13:5-6, 32:10; Is. 54:10; Lam. 3:32) and unescapable (Rom. 8:38-39). God has placed His love upon His children and we have not and cannot do anything to earn His love (John 4:19.) God not only loves, He is love (1 John 4:8). God's love is "uninfluenced" (Deut. 7:7-8; 2 Tim. 1:9), "eternal" (Eph. 1:4-5), "sovereign" (Rom. 9:13), "infinite" (John 3:16; Eph. 2:4), "immutable" (Song of Sol. 8:6-7; John 13:1; James 1:17), "holy" (Rom. 5:21), and "gracious."<sup>44</sup> God's love is not in conflict with or at odds with any other of part of His character.

### C. God as a Shepherd in the Old Testament

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42. John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, eds., *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 177.

43. Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), 216.

44. A.W. Pink, *The Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker House, 1975), 99-103.

1. In Isaiah 40 we are given a beautiful image of God as a shepherd who tenderly cares for His sheep (Is. 40:10-11).

a. The scene for this poignant imagery is set up in Isaiah chapters 38 and 39. King Hezekiah of Judah has been miraculously healed (Is. 38:9, 21) and supernaturally given 15 more years of life (Is. 38:4). Hezekiah makes a short-sighted or perhaps ill-advised decision to show all his wealth to the representatives of the Babylonian king (Is. 39:1-4) and thus the prophecy of the Babylonian captivity for Judah is pronounced from Isaiah (Is. 39:5-8).

b. Verses 10 and 11 chapter 40 tell of the coming Shepherd, the Messiah and the Hebrew word for “Shepherd” here is “raah” which goes beyond the meaning of only the one who tends to sheep in the field to more of a companion, friend, or similar to a best man in a wedding.<sup>45</sup> The words “gather, carry, lead” all convey the meaning of leadership and initiative toward His lambs.<sup>46</sup> Not to be overlooked is the use of “gently” with lead which had built into the Hebrew word the idea that the destination is one of rest and refreshment.<sup>47</sup>

c. An important contrast is between the “ruling arm” of verse 10 and the gathering “arm” of verse 11. “But mighty though He is, there is nothing ruthless in His power. Towards His people it is a power working by love:

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45. James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains : Hebrew (Old Testament)* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

46. Ibid.

47. Ibid.

the care that tends, the gentleness that makes provision for the weak (*the lambs*) and that caters to the particular needs (*those that have young*).<sup>48</sup>

2. The 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm provides a familiar and yet extremely valuable presentation and promise in the imagery of the Lord as our Shepherd. This Psalm is written by David, who had been a shepherd himself prior to his anointing as king of Israel (1 Sam. 16:11-13 Ez. 34:23).

a. “In both the ancient Near East and in the Old Testament, “shepherd” is a royal metaphor” but it is surprising that David refers to the Lord as his personal (my) shepherd.<sup>49</sup> His personal identification with the Shepherd shows a personal relationship that indicates the necessity of a child to have a personal relationship with God before she can truly know His sovereign love and care.<sup>50</sup>

b. David does not begin with the concept of sheep or even of shepherd, but he takes this cue from Scripture itself (Gen. 48:15-16).<sup>51</sup>

c. The opening statement of satisfaction comes from the words “I shall not want.” This from the Hebrew word “ekhsar” which gives the connotation having all that is needed, not lacking anything and has a future orientation.<sup>52</sup> This and the

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48. J. Alec Motyer, *Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 20, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 277.

49. Mark D. Futato, “The Book of Psalms” in *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary*, vol. 7, ed. Philip W. Comfort (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndal House Publishers, 2009), 101.

50. Susan Heck, “The Sovereignty of God as Seen in Psalm 145”, ACBC Annual Conference (Charlotte, NC: October 5, 2021), accessed November 17, 2021, <https://acbcdigitalresources.s3.us-west-2.amazonaws.com/resources/2021+Annual+Conference+-+O+Church+Arise/Breakout+Session+Audio/14+Susan%C2%A0Heck+-+The+Sovereignty+of+God+as%C2%A0Seen+in+Psalm+145.mp3>

51. Sinclair B. Ferguson, *Deserted by God?* (Edinburgh, UK: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1993), 23.

52. Futato, 101.

allusion to green pastures and quiet waters may be a reference for the original readers/singers to remember the wilderness wanderings.<sup>53</sup>

d. The divine name of Yahweh is the bookends of the six verses and His divine presence is surrounding the text as it does all of life.<sup>54</sup> The description of the attentive Shepherd opens with a promise of provision of daily bread, then offers daily guidance for all of life, and closes with assurance of daily bread again as the reader/singer is pointed to Good Shepherd of a future time (John 10).<sup>55</sup>

D. Jesus as the Good Shepherd in the New Testament. The reference is made to shepherd 59 times in 56 verses in the Bible<sup>56</sup>, 18 times in the New Testament and six of those times are in the passage of John 10:1-16. The Greek word for “shepherd” is “poimen” and the biblical usage for it is as a herdsman of sheep, and in a parable as one to whom others have committed for care and control, to follow their guidance.<sup>57</sup> This word is also used of Christ as head of the church (Heb. 13:20; 1 Pet. 2:25) and as pastor (Eph. 4:11).<sup>58</sup>

1. In John 10 Jesus presents Himself as “the good shepherd” (John 10:11).

Repeated six times, the metaphor of Jesus as a shepherd to His people is clear.

This passage is a parable that Jesus uses to teach those following Him just after

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53. Ibid.

54. Futato, 102.

55. Futato, 103.

56. "NASB95 Search Results for "shepherd"." Blue Letter Bible. Accessed 17 Nov, 2021. [https://www.blueletterbible.org//search/search.cfm?Criteria=shepherd&t=NASB95#s=s\\_primary\\_0\\_1](https://www.blueletterbible.org//search/search.cfm?Criteria=shepherd&t=NASB95#s=s_primary_0_1)

57. "G4166 - poimēn - Strong's Greek Lexicon (nasb95)." Blue Letter Bible. Accessed 17 Nov, 2021. <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g4166/nasb95/mgnt/0-1/>

58. Ibid.

the He had healed a man of blindness much to the ire of the Pharisees. The original audience in Jesus' time would understand His description of a sheep fold, its door, and those that watch the gate as Eastern sheep folds had only one door.<sup>59</sup>

a. Jesus begins the parable by showing the distinction between the real and false shepherds and makes an emphatic point with “Truly, truly” (10:1).

This is probably a link to the previous chapter and relates to the shepherding of the Pharisees in their interaction with the blind man.<sup>60</sup>

Drawing upon Old Testament allusions (Jer. 23, Ezek. 34, Zech. 9), the imagery of the shepherd is built upon with special emphasis upon criticizing the shepherds of Israel from Ezekiel 34.<sup>61</sup> The most encouraging promise from this portion of the passage is that Jesus explains that the true shepherd will call each of his own sheep by name and safely lead them out for sheep do not follow the voice of one that they do not know (10:4-5).

b. Jesus transitions from His discussion of the known shepherd and the stranger shepherd at the door to the imagery of Himself as the gate (10:7). He repeats the emphatic “Truly, truly” and states twice that “I am the door” (10:7,8). Not only does He set Himself as the guardian of all who may enter the sheep fold, but He offers salvation, “eksozo” in Greek

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59. Donald Guthrie, [“John,”](#) in *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, ed. D. A. Carson et al., 4th ed. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 1047.

60. Guthrie, “John”, 1047.

61. Ibid.

which implies to bring safely, to deliver in a future tense, passive voice.<sup>62</sup>

In the previous chapter the claims of the Pharisees were proven disastrous and Jesus' claim as shepherd now shows forth in salvation and sustenance (10:9) giving way abundant life (10:10).<sup>63</sup>

c. Jesus finishes out this parable with a twice repeated statement of His identity as "the good shepherd" (10:11,14). Referring to "the good shepherd" three times in two verses, Jesus paints a very full picture of who the good shepherd is. Once again contrasted with the enemy of the sheep, whether in the form of a wolf who seeks to devour the sheep or in the form of a hired hand who promises protection but flees in the face of danger (10:12), Jesus even reveals the uncaring heart of the hired hand (10:13). His heart is evident since He spoke of giving abundant life to others, now "Jesus spoke of the giving up of his own... but Jesus went beyond the metaphor to point to a deep spiritual truth. He drew attention to a voluntary act of sacrifice which would benefit the sheep."<sup>64</sup>

d. In this passage, we see a continuation of "I am" statements in which Jesus presents Himself as a metaphor in the book of John. He says that "I am the bread of life" (6:35, 41, 48), "I am the light of the world" (8:12), "I am the door" (10:7, 9), "I am the good shepherd" (8:11, 14), "I am the resurrection and the life" (11:25), "I am the way, and the truth, and the

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62. James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek (New Testament)* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

63. Guthrie, "John", 1047.

64. Guthrie, "John", 1047.

life” (14:6), “I am the vine” (15:1, 5). These are instrumental for a child to understand who Jesus is.

2. Another parable presents a shepherd who is caring for his sheep although he is never named as a shepherd. Luke 15:1-7 brings us to Jesus telling the tax collectors, sinners, Pharisees, and scribes all a lesson with deep meaning. As the previous chapter of Luke closes, large crowds had joined Jesus and He talked to them about the commitment and the need to count the cost of following Him.

a. The word used for “lost” is the Greek “apollymai” which holds the meaning of destroy, ruin, cause destruction.<sup>65</sup> This poor little sheep up on the hillside all alone is headed for destruction and ruin and the shepherd knows it. Jesus’ ultimate desire is to “seek and save” the lost (Luke 19:10) and the Father God even rejoices at one lost sinner found.<sup>66</sup> “This divine attitude is illustrated by the willingness of a shepherd to go out over the hills searching, so that not even one sheep may be missing from his flock.”<sup>67</sup> Repentance brings great rejoicing.

b. The shepherd in Jesus’ parable takes the initiative and goes searching for his lost sheep. When he finds the wayward animal, he does not call it to follow him or snare it with his shepherd’s crook. Jesus tells in deliberate terms just how the shepherd brings the sheep back home. Even though it caused him to wander out into the night, the shepherd lays it on his

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65. I. Howard Marshall, “[Luke](#),” in *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, ed. D. A. Carson et al., 4th ed. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 1005.

66. Ibid.

67. Ibid.

shoulders. This is reminiscent of John 10:11 where the shepherd carries the sheep in his arms.

c. In the final three verses of this passage, rejoicing is used three times and repent is used twice. In the original Greek, “chairō” is “rejoicing” which is to be glad, to be delighted.<sup>68</sup> When a sinner repents it is what the Greek word (metanoēo) says is “to change one’s life based on a complete change of attitude toward sin and righteousness.”<sup>69</sup>

## V. A Plan for Counseling

This section will focus on the actual counseling process and the methodology of dealing with an anxious child. The fundamental component of true biblical change is found in the gospel and several counseling sessions will be devoted to the presentation and application of the gospel. Actual counseling topics and possible homework assignments will be discussed here.

A. Pre-counseling with the gospel is where all biblical counseling should start. Since true transformation can only take place in the heart of someone who had the Holy Spirit indwelling, then even if parents and their child profess to know Christ, it is always the starting point to go over the gospel in very clear, biblical terms. If they have not truly trust in Christ and repented of their sins “they do not have the proper motivations to change or the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives.”<sup>70</sup> When counseling a parent to help her child with anxiety, the gospel should be shared with the parent and then reinforced once a true conversion is confirmed, as much as the counselor can

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68. Swanson, DBL Greek.

69. Ibid.

70. Martha Peace, “Ashley and Anorexia”, in *Counseling the Hard Cases*, eds. Stuart Scott and Heath Lambert (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2012), 144.

determine. The counselor can help the parent learn how to work through the gospel with her child in a specific directed way and also during informal times throughout the day. The gospel is the same for children and adults, but some of the language and illustrations may be adapted for children. C. H. Spurgeon is certain about true childhood conversions. “Believe that children can be saved as much as yourselves. When you see the young heart brought to the Saviour, don’t stand by and speak harshly, mistrusting every thing.”<sup>71</sup>

1. The parents can be asked questions about their faith to help diagnose their spiritual standing.
  - a. Who would you say Jesus is?
  - b. How would you define sin? Do you sin? What do you do about your sin? Do you know where you will go when you die?
  - c. Tell me about your relationship with God. Who is He to you?
2. It is most important that God be the starting point for a gospel presentation. God is loving, holy, righteous and just, perfect in all His ways (Ex. 34:6-7; I John 4:8; Lam. 3:31; Is. 6:3; Ps. 5:4; Deut. 32:4; Ps. 145:8, 17; Is. 40:18; Rev. 4:8).
3. Man was created in God’s image and originally free from sin, designed for fellowship with God, yet in the Garden of Eden Adam and Eve chose to disobey God and all of mankind followed in sin and separation from God (Gen. 1:26-27, 2:17-18, 3:1-7; Rom. 3:23, 5:12; 1 Cor. 15:22).
4. Sin is each person’s rejection and violation of God’s laws in thought, word, and deed. (Is. 53:6; Eph. 2:3; Rom. 2:23, 3:10-11, 5:12). Every person is a sinner and

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70. Charles H. Spurgeon, *Teaching Children* (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications), 3.

thus separated from the perfectly holy God to be judged for his sin (Is. 59:2-3; Pr. 8:13, 16:5; Rom. 1:18; Heb. 4:13).

5. Jesus Christ, God's only Son came to earth as the perfect God incarnate in flesh and was completely God and completely man (John 1:1, 1:14, 3:16-17; Phil. 2:5; Heb. 2:17; John 8:58; 1 Cor. 8:5-6; Col. 1:16-17). He came to bring salvation from the penalty of sin to man and God placed all mankind's sin upon Christ at His atoning death and granted to those who believe in Him the righteousness of Christ (Is. 53:6; 2 Cor. 5:21). Only Jesus could fulfill God's requirement for payment for sin (Is. 43:11; 2 Tim. 2:5).

6. Every person must individually respond to God's offer of salvation through Christ – either by rejection or by repentance and faith (Acts 17:30; Rom. 3:21-22; Eph. 1:7; Ezek. 18:21-22; Acts 3:19; John 3:36). Repentance and faith are two sides of one coin – turning away from sin and unbelief and the turning to Christ in a trusting embrace.<sup>72</sup>

7. Believing parents must share the gospel continually with their children. If an anxious child is not a Christian, she may still benefit from biblical counsel, but she cannot truly change until she is indwelt by the Holy Spirit through repentance and faith in Christ alone. Children raised in a Christian home may need to be instructed in how not to come to Christ (2 Cor. 5:15).<sup>73</sup> A child must consider whether she is habitually living for self or for Christ and parent should pray for wisdom to provide age-appropriate instruction in the gospel most efficacious in

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72. MacArthur, 590.

73. Peace and Scott, *The Faithful Parent*, 216.

for the moment.<sup>74</sup> “Remember, there is not one gospel for children and another for adults. The Scriptures encourage adult-like content and child-like faith, not the other way around.”<sup>75</sup>

B. After a thorough coverage of the gospel and, as best as the counselor can discern, the parents profess faith in Christ alone, actual biblical counseling can proceed. The child should be shown that the Bible is God’s unchanging, perfect, and all-sufficient Word – truth for every part of life (Deut. 6:6-7; 2 Sam. 22:31; Ps. 19:7; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; Heb. 4:12; 2 Pet. 1:3, 20-21). She should also be given hope that she is not alone in her struggles and that God will care for her in every way through it (1 Cor. 10:13; Heb. 13:5-6).

1. Homework after the first session could include the following:

- a. Have the child write out or dictate who Jesus is and what He has done for you.
- b. Ask the child to keep a journal of specific times when you feel anxious or afraid. Ask yourself these questions:
  - i. What am I feeling?
  - ii. What am I afraid of?
  - iii. What was I thinking?
  - iv. What did I want?
  - v. Where did I go for help?

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74. Ibid., 217.

75. Ibid.

c. Read through the first two sections of *The Gospel for Children* by John B. Leuzarder.<sup>76</sup>

i. Have the child ask questions about what she does not understand.

ii. Learn the caption for each picture.

d. Have her write the following verses on memorization/meditation cards and review them throughout the day and when you are anxious.

Meditation is the key to really applying God's truth from Scripture. It is not just reading or even memorization, it is a careful and thoughtful consideration of each word, focused on a point of specific personal application.

i. Heb. 13:5-6

ii. 1 Cor. 10:13

iii. Ps. 145:17

e. Attend church on Sunday and ask the child to make notes or pictures about the sermon. Discuss the sermon with her and find any application to her knowledge of the gospel.

2. In subsequent sessions, parents would then be shown how to help the child see the character of God and her need to trust in Him completely. This would be done for instructing the parent on the use of a worksheet for mining out observations and application from a specific passage. The goal is to help the parent provide counsel to her child that informs her heart as how God is a shepherd and what that means for her anxiety.

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76. John B. Leuzarder, *The Gospel for Children* (Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd Press, 1996).

a. Using Isaiah 40:10-11, the parent would show how God promised that He would send someone to rescue His people from their sin, hundreds of years before it happened. This savior is depicted as a loving, gentle shepherd who pays particular attention to the weak and helpless.

i. Read this passage each day. Ask the child what she learns about God and about herself in this passage.

ii. Read *Helping Your Anxious Child: When Worries Get Big* by Julie Lowe. Note five significant points and application steps.<sup>77</sup>

iii. List the things that made you anxious this week then write out a prayer thanking God for His tender care and asking Him to carry you when you are anxious.

iv. On memorization/meditation cards, write out Ps. 32:7; Phil. 4:6-7; Matt. 10:48.

v. Continue writing in the anxiety journal, adding a section for trusting – listing Scriptural truths that show how trusting the Good Shepherd can give different answers.

b. The heart that is anxious is also a proud heart because it is trusting in self rather than in God. As a parent helps her child see how compassionate and trustworthy God is she must be encouraged to trust in Him while repenting of her sin of self-reliance and pride. Psalm 23 provides a picture of helpless sheep and the loving provision of their shepherd. This Psalm

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<sup>77</sup>. Lowe, *Helping Your Anxious Child*.

should be studied and taught verse by verse allowing the child to personalize her worries and fears that are addressed.

i. At this point, the child should be helped to see that it is not the external fears that are causing her worry, but the lack of faith and pride in her heart. Assign Jer. 17:9; Prov. 4:23; and Mark 7:21 for her memorization/meditation cards.

ii. Watch “Tornado of Anxiety” by Pastor Larry

<https://vimeo.com/165692197>.<sup>78</sup> Explain this to your child the need to see how her heart is wanting to be in charge and how she must seek and trust God from the very beginning.

iii. Bring comfort and hope to your child through Matt. 11:28.

d. In sessions to follow, two New Testament passages are to be taught, teaching the child that the Lord Jesus is a good shepherd who guides and leads, protects, is faithful, and sacrificial. He knows His sheep, they know His voice, and trust Him completely. Children can see through this inspired description that Jesus loves and comes to the outcast. He knows the pressures of social media and bullies; the anguish of those left-out or pushed away. He values all His sheep and initiates a rescue of even just one headed for destruction. His is a life-long care and His sheep are kept forever.

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78. Pastor Larry, “Tornado of Anxiety”, Canyon Hills Counseling Center, accessed November 19, 2021, <https://www.canyonhillscmunitychurch.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Tornado-of-Anxiety.pdf>.

i. Homework in these sessions would include memorization and meditation cards based on 1 Peter 5:6-7; Rom. 8:28-29, 28-29; Matt. 6:33-34; Job 42:2; Is. 41:10; Luke 10:27.

ii. Listen to *Hidden in My Heart* Scripture Lullabies:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eyHn\\_KPm3uk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eyHn_KPm3uk) (“The Peace of God”)<sup>79</sup>

iii. Read *Zoe’s Hiding Place* by David Powlison and Joe Hox.<sup>80</sup>

iv. This is a good time to begin a “Thought Renewal Worksheet”<sup>81</sup>

helping the child to see how to put-off/Renew the mind/Put-on.

She is ready to begin replacing sinful, anxious thoughts with the truth of Scripture (Eph. 4:21-24; Col. 3:10, 16; 2 Cor. 5:17).

v. Talk of thoughts as “flies” and do the “Taking Thoughts

Captive” exercise by Julie Lowe.<sup>82</sup> This will help the anxious child realize that she controls her thoughts and not the other way around (2 Cor. 10:5).

v. Make a list of those who need encouragement and reach out to them finding something good to do for them. Taking a homemade card or cookies to an elderly neighbor or church member or

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79. “The Peace of God”, *Hidden in My Heart Lullaby Journey Through Scripture*, Vol. 1 (Sony CD, November 4, 2017).

80. David Powlison, *Zoe’s Hiding Place: When You are Anxious* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2018).

81. Stuart Scott, “Thought Renewal Worksheet”, (Course Materials, Applied Soul Care II: The Master’s University, Santa Clarita, CA, Fall 2021).

82. Julie Lowe, *Building Bridges, Biblical Counseling Activities for Children + Teens* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2020).

befriending a lonely child at school. Seek to serve and look to other's needs (Phil. 2:3-7).

## VI. Conclusion

A. In recent months with COVID continuing to press in on all sides, the ever-present weight of social media, and children increasingly the target of abuse and exploitation; anxiety among children is more prevalent than ever.<sup>83</sup>

B. Secular health care providers and therapists view anxiety as a brain/physical issue and tend to treat with medicine and behavior cognitive therapy; never addressing the root cause.

C. A biblical counselor can help parents to counsel their anxious child by helping her see her heart, her desires, and her need to trust in a loving, compassion God; who is her good shepherd. This transformation from anxiety to trust may take time (Phil. 2:12-13; 2 Cor. 3:18) but will lead to still waters, green pastures, and peace beyond understanding.

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83. Charles Hodges, MD, "Anxiety, Medicine, and the Psalms", ACBC Annual Conference (Charlotte, NC: October 5, 2021), accessed November 18, 2021.

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