



*Luke 12*

GOD SPEAKS

*to our*

ANXIOUS HEARTS

Jennifer Huang Harris, MD | BCBC Conference | June 3, 2023

# WE LIVE IN A TIME OF ANXIETY

- **Global threats:** The Pandemic. Global warming.
- **Cultural changes:** Politics. Race relations. Gender and sexuality issues.
- **Technology changes:** Artificial Intelligence. Social media. Genetic engineering.
- **Loss of Community**
- **Financial Stress**

**What causes you anxiety?**



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The role of fear to assess threat

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When fear becomes anxiety

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Secular strategies for anxiety

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God speaks

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Our response

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# OVERVIEW



DESCRIBING  
ANXIETY

# EMOTIONS



- Emotions help us react to the environment, respond to other people, and relate to God

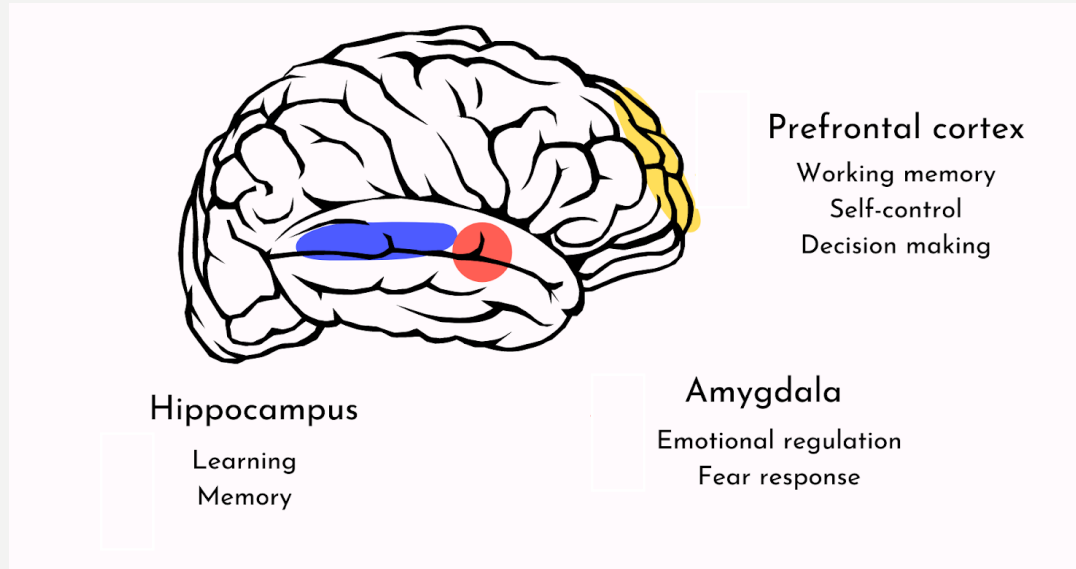
# FEAR CAN BE AN ADAPTIVE PHYSIOLOGICAL RESPONSE TO THREAT



- Fear flags something as being very important
- Fear appraises a threat as being powerful and dangerous
- Fear activates the human body to respond to the threats



# THE FEAR PATHWAY

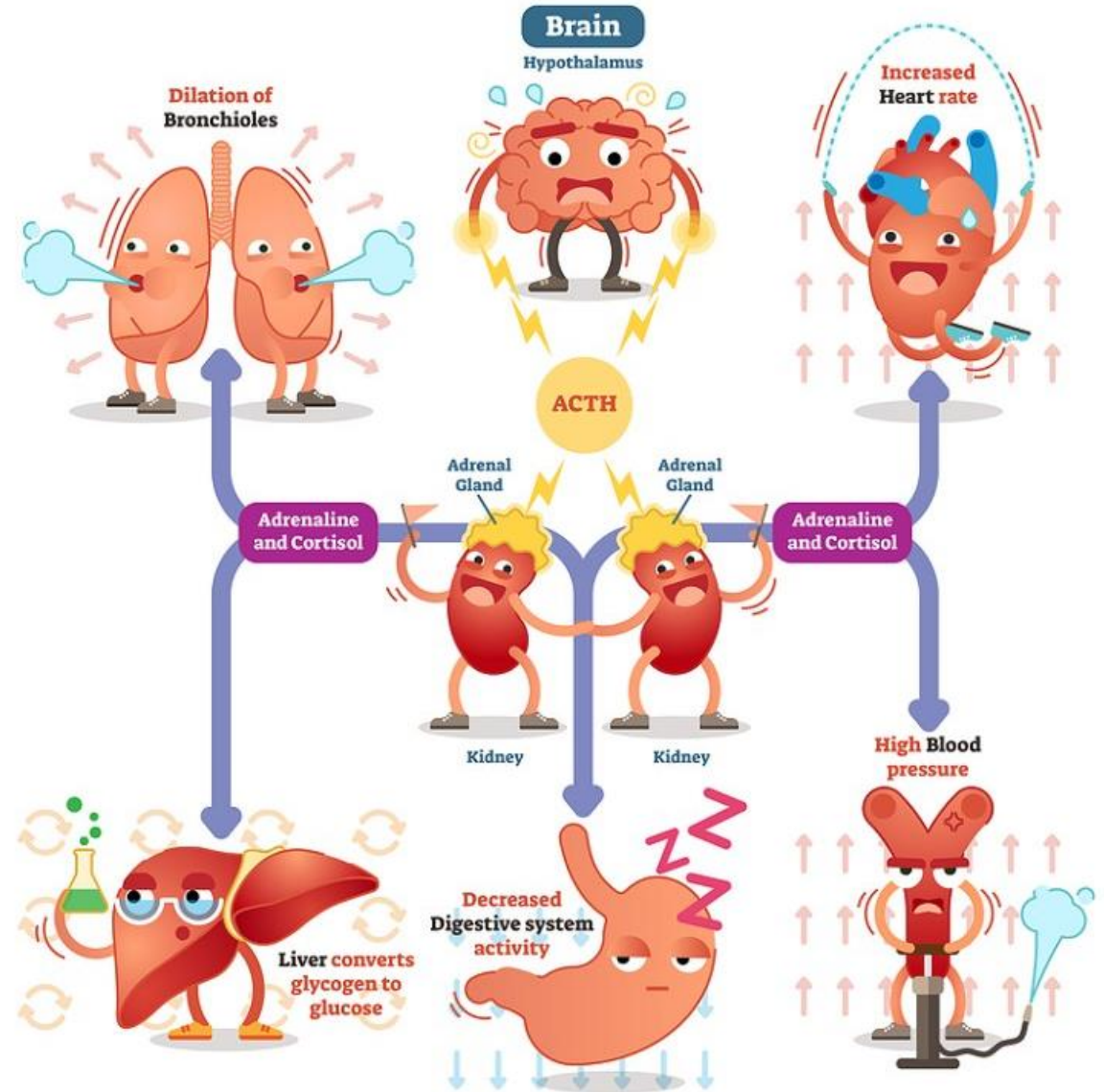


- Amygdala: emotional part of the brain involved with threat appraisal.
- The amygdala activates the body's HPA hormone axis (cortisol) and the sympathetic nervous system (adrenaline)

# THE FEAR PATHWAY

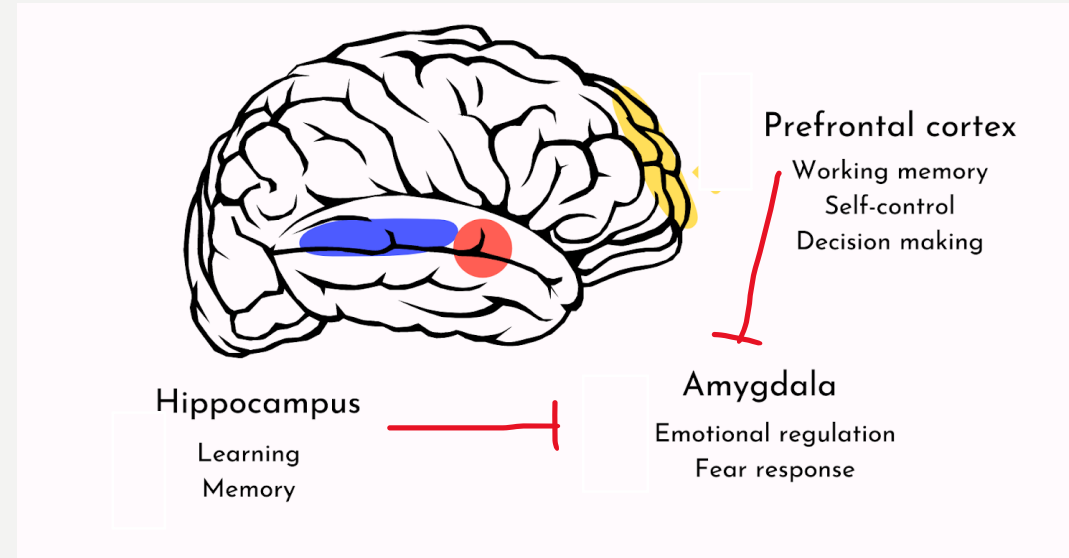
Leads to physiological response:

- increased alertness and vigilance
- Faster response time
- Heightened senses
- Circulate blood and oxygen to the extremities
- Dump any excess weight → GI and urinary incontinence
- Now we're ready to fight, or flight





# THE FEAR PATHWAY



- Hippocampus and the prefrontal cortex – the “thinking” parts of the brain
- They regulate the amygdala
- Help a person interpret the threat and give it context

# HOW DO WE DEVELOP FEARS?

- We learn from personal experience
- We witness others' experience
- We observe other's responses
- We have a direct and frightening experience
- We are taught fear

# THE LOGIC OF ANXIETY

- Our assessment of the threat
- Our assessment of our vulnerability and helplessness
- If I imagine the worst, then nothing can surprise me
- I can prevent bad things from happening
- Anxiety makes me function better



# THE FEAR SYSTEM BREAKS DOWN

- Normally, after the threat is gone, the body returns to its resting state.
- When fear continues past the threat or becomes out of proportion to the situation, then it becomes an anxiety *disorder*.
- Our fear system can become overreactive, and identify threats where there are none
- The “thinking brain,” rather than calming down our amygdala, can feed into imaginary fears
- When we’re anxious, what we fear is in the future.
- We dwell on our anxieties and they grow bigger
- **Avoidance** worsens our anxiety, since the imagined threat only grows.
- This creates a cycle - we start to fear the feeling of anxiety

# THE CONSEQUENCES OF ANXIETY

- Physical consequences of prolonged stress:
  - insomnia
  - hypertension, diabetes, obesity
  - Cardiovascular: Increased risk of strokes and heart attacks
  - GI:
- Functional: procrastination, difficulty trying new things
- Social: avoidance, irritability, anger, violence
- Self-medication / substance abuse –alcohol, marijuana

# SOME PEOPLE ARE MORE VULNERABLE TO ANXIETY

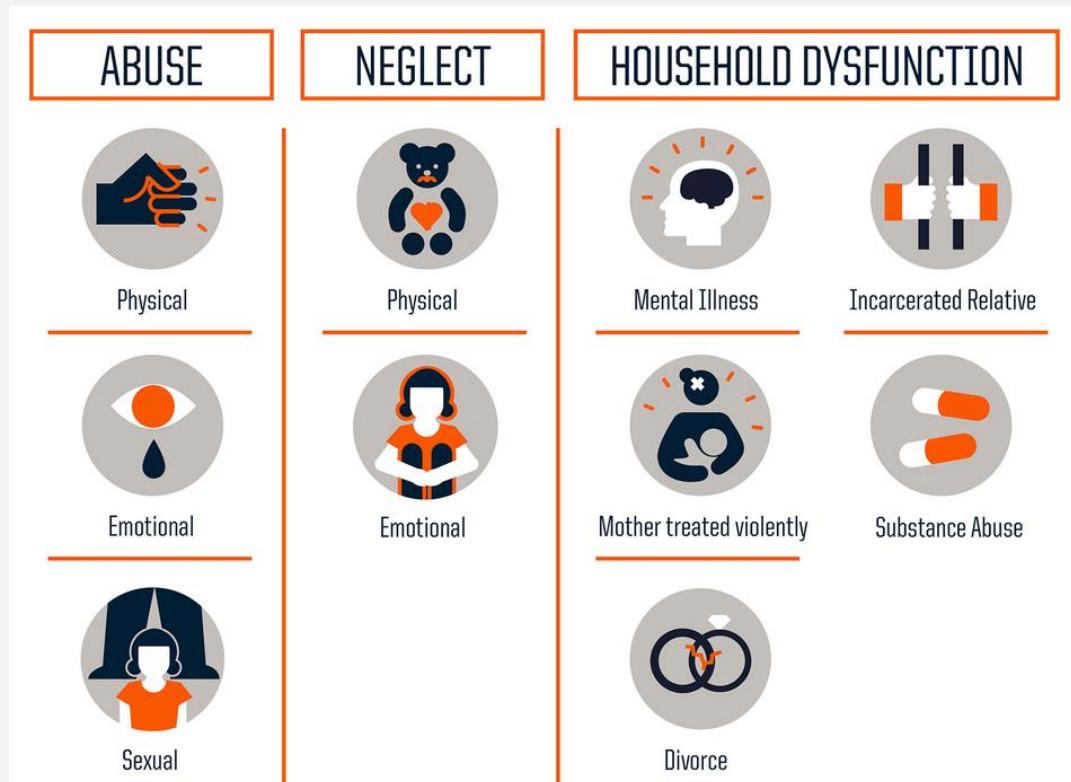
- Those with **genetic predisposition to anxiety** – e.g. oversensitive alarm system
  - family history of anxiety
  - E.g. obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD)
- **Medical conditions:**
  - Pulmonary conditions like COPD
  - Tumors or medical conditions increasing cortisol or thyroid hormone
  - Cardiac conditions –heart attacks and panic attacks can feel similar
- Those on **medications** or using **substances** that can cause or worsen anxiety
  - Steroids, thyroid medication
  - Marijuana, alcohol
  - Caffeine, ADHD medication
  - Decongestants





# SOME PEOPLE ARE MORE VULNERABLE TO ANXIETY

- Those in **anxiety-producing situations** – e.g. in abusive relationships, stressful work environments, those experiencing financial instability, violence
- Those with **early childhood traumatic events**
  - “ACES” – Adverse Childhood Experiences
- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)





PSYCHIATRIC  
STRATEGIES

# PSYCHIATRIC STRATEGIES

- Decreasing our physiologic response
- Cognitions - Working on our “thinking brain”
- Threat Assessment - Working on our “emotional brain”

# PSYCHIATRIC STRATEGIES

## Decreasing our physiologic response

- Relaxation methods:
  - Breathing exercises
  - Biofeedback
  - Progressive muscle relaxation
- Mindfulness / Meditation – increase self awareness, bring ourselves to the present moment rather than living in our thoughts and the future



“Visualize yourself not falling off the wall.”

# PSYCHIATRIC STRATEGIES FOR DEALING WITH ANXIETY

## Cognitions

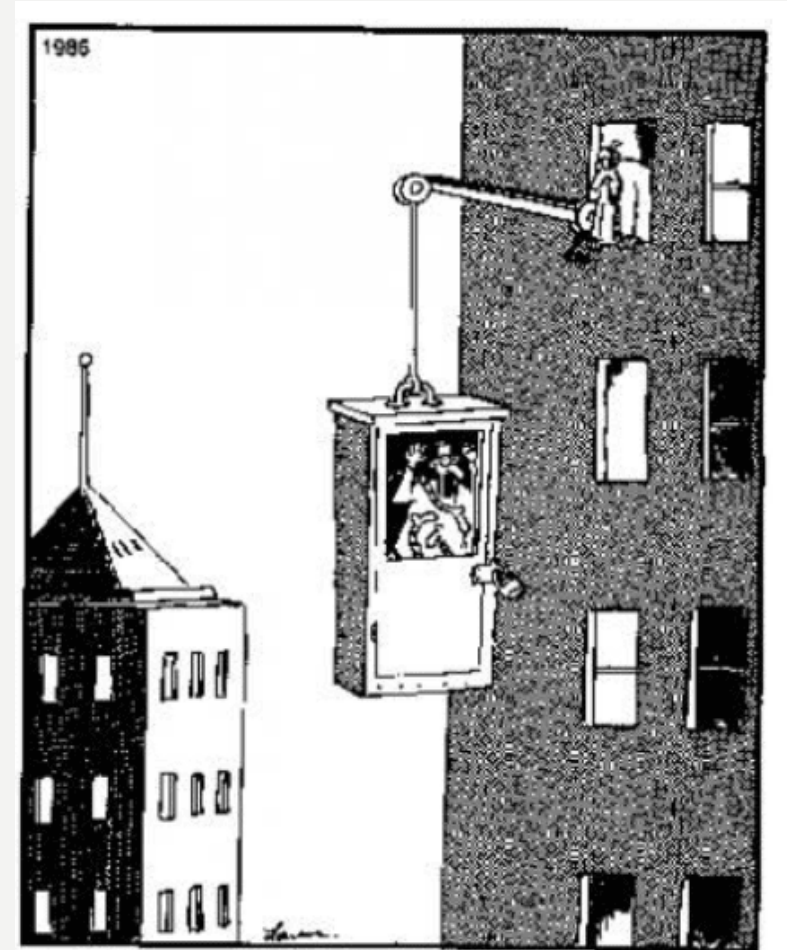
- Cognitive Therapy
  - addressing unreasonable fears and faulty logic
  - Improving our ability to judge context

# PSYCHIATRIC STRATEGIES FOR DEALING WITH ANXIETY

## Threat Assessment

- Exposure Therapy

- Confronting our fears and learning how to calm yourself down



Professor Gallagher and his controversial technique of simultaneously confronting the fear of heights, snakes and the dark.



# PSYCHIATRIC STRATEGIES FOR DEALING WITH ANXIETY

- **Medication:**

- Serotonergic medications – SSRIs / SNRIs
- Buspirone
- Benzodiazepines – Xanax, Valium, Ativan, Klonopin



GOD SPEAKS

# LUKE 12

## **Have No Fear**

4 “I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do. 5 But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him! 6 Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? And not one of them is forgotten before God. 7 Why, even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not; you are of more value than many sparrows.

# LUKE 12

## The Parable of the Rich Fool

13 Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.” 14 But he said to him, “Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?” 15 And he said to them, “Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.” 16 And he told them a parable, saying, “The land of a rich man produced plentifully, 17 and he thought to himself, ‘What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?’ 18 And he said, ‘I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. 19 And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.”’ 20 But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ 21 So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.”

# LUKE 12

## **Do Not Be Anxious**

22 And he said to his disciples, “Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on. 23 For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. 24 Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! 25 And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? 26 If then you are not able to do as small a thing as that, why are you anxious about the rest?”

# LUKE 12

- 27 Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin,[d] yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 28 But if God so clothes the grass, which is alive in the field today, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith! 29 And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried. 30 For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them. 31 Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you.



# LUKE 12

- 32 “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. 33 Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. 34 For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

# WE ARE LIKE GRASS



- We are vulnerable
- We are finite
- We do not have control over our lives

# SEEING WITH NEW EYES

- **Our true context:**

**We are not alone in the world. God is in control**

- **The true threat assessment:**

**Fear God**

- **Proverbs 9:10**

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.



# A CAUTIONARY TALE

## The Parable of the Rich Fool

16 And he told them a parable, saying, “The land of a rich man produced plentifully, 17 and he thought to himself, ‘What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?’ 18 And he said, ‘I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. 19 And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.”’ 20 But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ 21 So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.”

# FINDING COMFORT IN FEAR



“Ooh!” said Susan, “I’d thought he was a man. Is he—quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion.”

“That you will, dearie, and no mistake,” said Mrs Beaver. “If there’s anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they’re either braver than most or else just silly.”

“Then he isn’t safe?” said Lucy.

“Safe?” said Mr Beaver; “don’t you hear what Mrs Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? ‘Course he isn’t safe. But he’s good. He’s the King, I tell you.”

“I’m longing to see him,” said Peter, “even if I do feel frightened when it comes to that point.”

CS Lewis, *The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe* 146–147



# FINDING COMFORT IN FEAR

Exodus 14:31

“When the people saw what God had done to the army of Egypt, they feared the Lord and put their trust in Him.”

“We cannot separate trust in God from the fear of God. We will trust Him only to the extent that we genuinely stand in awe of him.”

Jerry Bridges, *The Joy of Fearing God*



# HE CALLS US HIS OWN

Luke 12:32

"Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom"

- We belong to God
- We are of value to God
- He is our Father
- Our Father knows our needs



OUR  
RESPONSE

# SEEK FIRST HIS KINGDOM

- “Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you.”
- “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”

# ROMANS 8

- Romans 8
- 31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? ....
- 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?...
- 37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

# BRING YOUR ANXIETIES TO GOD

1 Peter 5:6-7

Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.

# BE GENEROUS

Luke 14: 33-34

33 Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. 34 For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

# LOVE

1 John 4:17-19

17 By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world.

18 There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. 19 We love because he first loved us.



## References & Resources

- Ed Welch, *Running Scared: Fear, Worry, and the God of Rest*
- Ed Welch, *When People are Big and God is Small*
- David Powlison: “ ‘Peace, Be Still’: Learning Psalm 131 by Heart (JBC Vol 18, No 3, Spring 2000) and in *Seeing with New Eyes*
- David Powlison: “Don’t Worry: Luke 12:22-34”, in *Seeing with New Eyes*
- Jerry Bridges, *The Joy of Fearing God*
- William J. Knaus, *The Cognitive Behavioral Workbook for Anxiety*
- Alasdair Groves & Winston Smith – *Untangling Emotions*





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