

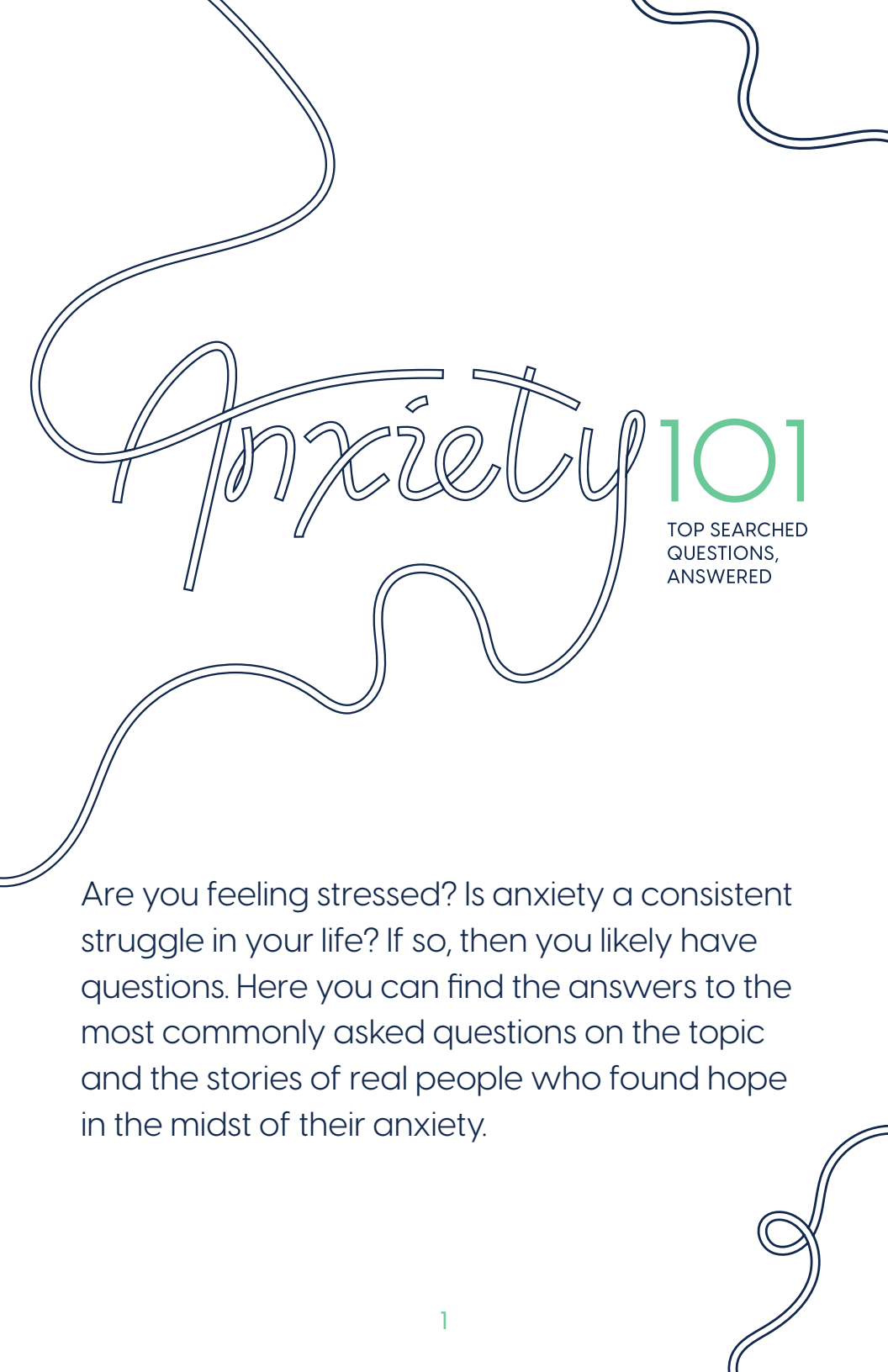
I AM SECOND

Anxiety 101

TOP SEARCHED
QUESTIONS,
ANSWERED

eBook





Anxiety 101

TOP SEARCHED
QUESTIONS,
ANSWERED

Are you feeling stressed? Is anxiety a consistent struggle in your life? If so, then you likely have questions. Here you can find the answers to the most commonly asked questions on the topic and the stories of real people who found hope in the midst of their anxiety.

“

**300 million
people around
the world
are living with
an anxiety
disorder.**

”



IS MY ANXIETY NORMAL?



Anxiety comes in all shapes and sizes. You can experience it after a big move, a job change, a new relationship status or a new project. Sometimes you may feel anxious without even knowing why. But whatever you are feeling and for whatever reason, you can rest assured that millions of people are feeling similarly as you are at this moment. In fact, as you read this sentence, as many as 300 million people around the world are living with an anxiety disorder.¹

¹World Health Organization. "Mental Disorders." *World Health Organization*, World Health Organization, 8 June 2022, <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-disorders>.

And that number only includes those whose anxiety rises to the level of a disorder.

Whether your anxiety has risen to that level or not, you are normal.

Your body was specifically designed to respond to dangers of all sorts: emotional, mental, physical and spiritual. Anxiety is the name we often give to that response. It is your body's attempt to ready you for action so you can face whatever lurks ahead.

Sometimes it will turn out to be a false alarm. Sometimes the alarm will get stuck in the on position. But other times anxiety will give you just what you need to deal with real challenges. Anxiety is a good and purposeful part of the human experience, even though it is also uncomfortable.

Even Jesus felt anxiety. Just before one of his followers betrayed him, he took his closest friends to go with him to pray. Why? Because he was "greatly distressed and troubled," the Bible says. He knew that soon he would be falsely arrested, tortured and executed. This approach to danger created

an emotional response that prompted him to gather his friends and pray. His distress or anxiety made him better prepared for what was to come.



DOES ANXIETY MEAN THAT I AM WEAK?



No, not at all.

Every emotional state has a purpose. Happiness tells you that something good has happened. Sadness can alert you to a loss, so you can pause and take the time to heal. Anger helps you see injustice, so you can identify what is wrong.

Thus, anxiety functions similar to an alarm system. It tells you when a potential danger needs your attention. Anxiety, then, is a sign that your body possesses this essential feature. That is a good thing, not a sign that you are weak or broken.

“

**But in time,
he realized that
trusting God
makes you
strong...**

”

It reminds me of [Chad Robichaux](#). By most measures, Chad was a strong person. As a Force Recon Marine who served eight tours in some of the most dangerous places on earth, he proved himself more capable than most. Then as a Mixed Martial Arts champion, he showed he had the determination and strength to push himself to the absolute limit. Few would call him weak. But the stresses he faced still led to a debilitating response that needed to be dealt with.

His problem was not that he was weak but that he needed to deal with and respond appropriately to the evils, dangers and stresses he had faced. Specifically for him, he needed to accept that everyone is built to need God. It does not matter how strong or how determined you are; you are built with a God-sized need. Chad struggled to accept that this did not mean he was weak. But in time, he realized that trusting God makes you strong, just as seeking the help and support of other people makes you strong. The same is true for you. When the anxiety alarm goes off in your body

and mind, it should alert you to call for help from God and others. Experiencing anxiety does not mean you are weak. You are more vulnerable if you ignore the signals and try to do things alone.



IS ANXIETY WRONG?



There is a verse in the Bible that says, ["Do not be anxious about anything."](#) This has led many followers of Jesus to think that anxiety is a sign of failure. But even those unfamiliar with this verse often feel tempted to hide their feelings of anxiety. Many feel a sense of shame for experiencing anxiety. This quickly compounds itself as you can then grow anxious from the guilt of being anxious.

It is helpful to remember that anxiety has a good and positive purpose. Anxious feelings are not something you need to be ashamed of. There are unhelpful ways of

expressing or dealing with anxiety, just like anger, sadness or even happiness. But that does not make the emotion itself wrong.

Consider the story of Olympic Gold Medalist [Shawn Johnson East](#). She started gymnastics when she was just three years old. By the age of six, she decided to pursue the Olympic dream. This drive to win created anxiety about losing. When channeled correctly, anxiety can focus one's efforts and develop a sense of purpose and clarity. People often describe this response with words like "passion" or "determination." And she needed an extraordinary dose of these things to succeed in the sport.

In her own words, she says,

"Gymnastics is a brutal sport. It's the only elite-level sport that deals with kids. There are football players out there or track athletes who might put in 80 hours a week, but they're not twelve years old. Gymnastics requires that mental strength from a kid."

“

**...experiencing
anxiety is
normal and
does not mean
you are weak
or sinful.**

”

In this way, you can see how a certain stress level provided her with the strength and focus she needed to succeed.

But over time, her drive to succeed grew into something else. She began to associate winning with her sense of self. Gymnastics became her identity and losing at gymnastics felt like losing at life. She experienced overwhelming waves of anxiety as this type of thinking progressed. This new level of stress signaled to her that she needed to make a change. Eventually, her anxiety helped her to see the danger of conflating the accolades of sports with her self-worth. This was a spiritual danger that her anxiety enabled her to identify. Her anxiety had a purpose. Specifically, her anxiety led her to trust God rather than gymnastics for her sense of worth and identity.

[“Do not be anxious about anything”](#) is only the first half of the verse that I quoted above. The rest of the verse tells the purpose of anxiety when it says, [“...but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving,](#)

present your requests to God." If you refuse to get help, ignore the warning signs and push away people who care about you, then you could say that staying in your anxiety is wrong. But anxiety was designed for a purpose. It's letting you know that you need to trust God and get support from others for the challenges ahead. If you do this, then "the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your heart and mind in Christ Jesus."

So experiencing anxiety is normal and does not mean you are weak or sinful. But that doesn't mean you should accept your current level of anxiety. It is not something that should be ignored or left to run its course.



CAN I OVERCOME ANXIETY?



This is a common question, but let's reframe what some may mean by *overcome*. To say you want to overcome anxiety suggests that anxiety is an issue or obstacle that needs to be defeated. Instead, let's examine anxiety as a normal emotion that needs to be recognized and properly managed.

[Sarah Taylor's](#) story is a good example of how to achieve emotional balance. One day, she was attacked while out for a run in her seemingly safe neighborhood. A man attempted to kidnap her by shoving her into his vehicle.

“

**So fear and
anxiety served a
positive purpose
for Sarah. It saved
her life.**

”

But her body produced a strong emotional response to the attack. In that moment of extreme danger, her body produced a powerful emotional response that gave her the clarity and strength to fight off her attacker and escape danger physically. Without this intense response, she would have likely been abducted. So fear and anxiety served a positive purpose for Sarah. It saved her life.

But after the attack, the anxiety did not go away. It actually grew, seeping into Sarah's everyday life. She could not get the fear and anxiety to subside. After years of struggling, she realized it was a sign that she had another issue that needed to be addressed and resolved. She eventually discovered that she harbored unforgiveness towards her attacker. This is a different type of spiritual danger. Her struggle for years with anxiety helped Sarah realize her need to forgive. She was able to overcome her fears and experience peace, but only after she identified the root of her anxiety.

If you are noticing your anxiety lingering or growing, then you may also have something hidden in your past that needs to be confronted. Professional counselors, pastors or ministers are especially gifted in helping people process through emotions. Sometimes speaking to a trusted friend or a support group may be exactly what you need for next steps.



WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT MY ANXIETY?



First, you should have a proactive approach when understanding anxiety and how it functions. This can relieve you of the guilt and shame that often accompanies anxiety. Many of the questions we just addressed are designed to help you do just that.

“

**Do not
ignore anxiety.
It does not just
go away.**

”

Second, because you are not alone in this journey, you can learn from those who have faced the same challenges. If you go back and watch the stories we referenced from [Chad Robichaux](#), [Shawn Johnson East](#) and [Sarah Taylor](#), then you will notice specific patterns emerge. Your journey is unique, but their journeys provide some helpful insights and applications. Each of these people found the following essential to managing their anxiety:

Listen

Do not ignore anxiety. It does not just go away on its own. And ignoring your emotions will likely make it worse. Instead, listen to your body, your emotions and even the people around you who might be telling you something is up.

Consider the physical

Your body can and will affect your emotions. If your sleep, diet or exercise routines are off, then anxiety can creep in. Remember that your body has limits and foster good habits that ensure your body remains healthy.

Consider the spiritual

Recognize that anxiety may signal that you have a spiritual issue that needs addressing. For example, sometimes anxiety reveals to a person that they do not have a relationship with God or that one's relationship with God is struggling. If you are not someone who has ever done much praying, then consider adding daily conversations with God to your life. We believe it will bring you a sense of peace since we are designed to have a relationship with God.

Connect with people

God made us – that includes you – to need people. You will become weak if you try to do life alone. So share your anxiety struggles with a close friend, find a support group or talk to a spiritual leader or trained mental health professional. Don't know where to start? Try talking to one of our free [I Am Second coaches](#) that are available for help.

Finally, when it comes to anxiety, it is not a question of if you will face it but when. It is a normal part of life and something that requires

practice. For some, it will be a more significant struggle than for others. But hopefully, you now have a few tools to help you understand and manage your anxiety. And remember, you are not alone!



I Am Second is a nonprofit launched in 2008 that ignites hope and inspires people to live for God and for others. Its website, iamsecond.com, features written and film-based stories of more than 150 athletes, actors, models, musicians, cultural influencers and everyday people who have stepped in front of the camera and declared, "I Am Second."

For information, visit iamsecond.com.

I AM SECOND®