

Praise Under Pressure

How to Cultivate a Worship-Filled Lifestyle Amidst Anxiety

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A Senior Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for graduation
in the Honors Program
Liberty University
Spring 2021

Acceptance of Senior Honors Thesis

This Senior Honors Thesis is accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation from the Honors Program of Liberty University.

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Abstract

Rates of anxiety are at its highest point in the late Millennial and early Gen-Z population, prompting a rise in mental health awareness. For those practicing the Christian faith, it can be difficult to follow Apostle Paul's simple command to "not be anxious" (Philippians 4:6). This thesis will conduct a targeted literature review of music and group-counseling-based therapy, as both have proven to positively affect anxiety and stress symptoms. Combining these two methodologies with worship lifestyle principles and counseling exercises, a church-modeled devotional study will be created to encourage believers to cling to faith in God despite rising anxiety. The objective is to provide local churches with materials that can guide individuals through practical steps to worship God amidst anxiety.

Praise Under Pressure: How to Cultivate a Worship-Filled Lifestyle Amidst Anxiety

Anxiety is a real and personal experience to most people in this world, especially for college students between the age eighteen and twenty-four. Even for those who practice Christianity, individuals in this age group struggle with anxiety. The church involvement on combatting the mental illness may range from dismissal to condemnation to platitude, with a call to simply “pray”, to “cast it off”, or “to not fear.” While these are words from the Word of God, the verses may cause those who struggle with anxiety disappointment due to the simplicity in command, but complexity in the practical application. With positive results seen in not only group counseling but also music therapy for this age group, these two paths for reducing anxiety and its symptoms can be put into a biblical context, allowing the life of the church to take a more active role in a student’s faith life.

Anxiety: Terminology and Generational Observations

People use the term *anxiety* in a broad number of ways, so it is important to define key terms that will be used in this thesis. Stress is response to external demanding environments, often leaving an individual feeling emotional and or physical tension, tightness, and pressure.¹ Stress can be defined as “a response to a threat in a situation. Anxiety is a reaction to the stress.”² In other terms, stress is related to past or present events, while anxiety is related to events about to happen or later future events. The two can be seen as separate entities, each having their own

1. Alexander Bystrisky and David Kronemyer, “Stress and Anxiety: Counterpart Elements of the Stress/Anxiety Complex”, *Psychiatrics Clinics of North America*, no. 37, vol. 4 (December 2014): 491.

2. “Stress,” Anxiety and Depression Association of America, date accessed February 10, 2021, <https://adaa.org/understanding-anxiety/related-illnesses/stress#:~:text=Everyone%20experiences%20stress%20and%20anxiety,least%20moderately%20with%20their%20lives.>

effect on the mind and body, but should be considered in an overlapping process, as they are closely related.³

Since 2007, the American Psychological Association has conducted case studies on stress amongst the general American population. In the 2019 publication of the survey, the top two reports of stressors were mass shootings and health care (almost 7 in 10 adults).⁴ A more age-specific survey was completed in 2018 specifically focusing on adults ages between 15 and 21. Compared to the other generations, Gen Z lead in self-reports of fair or poor mental health, with 9 out of 10 Gen Z adults (age 18-21) experiencing physical symptoms of stress within the past month.⁵ Some of these symptoms include muscle tension, increased heart rate, and rapid breathing.⁶ Dr. Arthur C. Evans Jr., APA's chief executive officer, notes that Gen Z's self-awareness and openness to reporting about poor mental health "represents an opportunity to start discussions about managing their stress, no matter the cause."⁷ Topics and subjects that trigger this stress and anxiety are closely related to the pressure and performance at secondary institutions. An American College Health Association study in 2019 showed that within a twelve-month period, students found the following areas of life traumatic: academics (51.2%), finances (36.9%), sleep difficulties (35.2%), personal appearances (32.8%) and social relationships (30.7%).⁸ With this in mind, it is important to address the rising issue of mental

3. Bystrisky, "Stress and Anxiety: Counterpart Elements of the Stress/Anxiety Complex", 494.

4. American Psychological Association "Stress in America: Stress and Current Events," *Stress in America™ Survey*, (2019): 2.

5. *Ibid.*, 4.

6. American Psychiatric Association, "Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders," 5th ed. (Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric, 2013). <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.books.9780890425596.dsm05>

7. Sophie Bethune, "Gen Z more likely to report mental health concerns," *Monitor on Psychology* 50, no. 1 (January 2019): <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2019/01/gen-z>.

health, especially in the context stress and anxiety, as it can lead to harmful health situations if not treated correctly.

The Study of Worship

Defining Worship

The most common forms of the word *worship* seen in the New Testament are *proskeneo*, which translates as “to worship”, “to show homage by bows or by prostration”, followed by *latreuo*, meaning “to serve” and *pipto*, meaning “to fall.”⁹ The primary common theme that these conjugations share is ascribing worth or value to the object of worship. This is similar to the Old English form of the word *weorþscipe*, interpreted as someone or something containing a condition or quality of worth.¹⁰ American author David Foster Wallace says “There is no such thing as not worshipping. Everybody worships. The only choice we get is what to worship.”¹¹ As creatures that naturally worship through the means of time dedication, money, thoughts, energy, and other avenues, it is important to distinguish why YHWH ultimately and solely deserves all the honor, glory, and praise. Worship is the proper response of all mankind, as God is worthy.¹²

The Object of Worship

God has infinite characteristics, including some transcend human comprehension. Nonetheless, it is important to understand the character and qualities of God, as it encourages

8. American College Health Association, “American College Health Association-National College Health Assessment II: Reference Group Executive Summary Spring 2019,” *American College Health Association*, 2019, 14.

9. “Greek Words for Worship,” The Eschaton Institute, accessed March 6, 2021, <https://eschaton.org/Worship/3-Greek-Words-for-Worship.pdf>.

10. “worship (n.),” Online Etymology Dictionary, accessed March 6, 2021, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/worship>.

11. “This is Water by David Foster Wallace (Full Transcript and Audio),” Farnam Street, accessed March 6, 2021, <https://fs.blog/2012/04/david-foster-wallace-this-is-water/>.

12. D.A. Carson, *Worship by the Book*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 26.

believers to engage in a personal relationship with Him. The first of the highest commands charged to Christians is “to love the LORD, your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.”¹³ One might question an individual’s love for another if there is no knowledge of that other. The same principle is applied to God. There is a difference between knowing *about* God and *knowing God*. When one knows God, the reasons for worship become undeniable.

Immutable

The quality of immutability is a foreign concept to ascribe to mankind; due to humanistic instincts, it is typical for one to evolve, better one’s self, and adapt in order to overcome challenges during this lifetime. On the other hand, God proclaims that He is constant and never-changing.¹⁴ God’s essence, purpose, and character are all untouchable, as He is “an underived self-dependent being.”^{15,16} Unlike humans where change is common, God is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow.¹⁷ His consistency is the firm foundation that believers can put their trust in. Even though circumstances, emotions, and people may change, God’s nature is to remain steady and constant, unwavering by the troubles and cares of the world. Charles Spurgeon emphasizes that a changeable God would ensure believers to “have no sure anchorage, and amid a changing

13. Deuteronomy 6:5.

14. Malachi 3:6.

15. John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine: God the Father*, (Wheaton, IL: Good News Publishers, 2017), 169.

16. Bible Hub, “Malachi 3,” MacLaren Commentary, accessed March 6, 2021, <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/macclaren/malachi/3.htm>.

17. Hebrews 13:13.

world they would be driven to and fro in perpetual fear of shipwreck.”¹⁸ Those who call upon the Lord have the assurance of a steadfast and secure foundation, for He Himself does not change.

Omniscient

The fear and awe of God must acknowledge that He is omniscient. He is able to see all things at once, being completely aware of events happening at all times.¹⁹ James Montgomery Boice observes that “omniscience involves not only God’s knowledge of us but also his knowledge of nature, the past, present, and future.”²⁰ His wisdom is much larger than just an individual’s current state of emotions, stressors, emotions, responsibilities, and everything else in between. God’s complete knowledge includes an in-depth awareness of events past, current, and future, and how all of them work together according to His will. This truth can offer peace and hope to those who struggling with worry and anxiety. Pastor Adrian Rogers challenges believers to ponder the idea that nothing occurs to God.²¹ While this type of exposure can be perceived as a threat to some, others can experience true comfort due to God’s possession of holy wisdom and knowledge of all things.

Faithful

A definitive characteristic of God is His faithfulness towards mankind. The overarching theme of promise making and promise keeping throughout the Bible is evident of God’s loyalty to His word and His people. Unlike people who waver in word and deed, the Lord promises to

18. Charles Spurgeon, “The Treasury of David: Psalm 100,” The Spurgeon Archive, accessed March 6, 2021, <https://archive.spurgeon.org/treasury/ps100.php>.

19. Proverbs 15:3.

20. James Montgomery Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986) 134.

21. Pastor Adrian Rogers, sermon, n.d.

uphold every covenant that He makes because He is a faithful God.²² Due to mankind's inherent sinfulness, he is unfaithful to God. The beautiful aspect of God's faithfulness is its steadfastness. Spurgeon notes that "[t]he glory of God's faithfulness is that no sin of ours has ever made Him unfaithful."²³ It is this quality of God that encouraged Thomas O Chisholm to write one of the most well-known hymns of the Christian faith, "Great is Thy Faithfulness":

Great is thy Faithfulness, O God my Father.

There is no shadow of turning with thee.²⁴

The Reason for Worship

Redemption from Sin

God is worthy of worship because He redeemed mankind from the slavery of sin. This is a three-fold concept that showcases God's worth. First, He is a Holy God. Boice explains that "Holy is not an ethical concept at all. Rather it means that which is of the very nature of God and which therefore distinguishes him from everything else."²⁵ Instead of relating this term to human ethics, the word *holy* must truly be applied in its intended definition. Derived from the Greek word *hagios*, it describes the object of "being different from the world", and "in likeness with the nature of God."²⁶ God's holiness is something that cannot be measured in human terms, no matter how hard one tries to understand it.

22. Deuteronomy 7:9. It is important to note the command to walk and live accordingly to the laws of God is called for *following* God's redemption of mankind. This is applicable to both the enslavement of Egypt (contextually) and the enslavement of sin (overall theme).

23. Charles Spurgeon, "The Attributes of God- Spurgeon," *Precept Austin*, date accessed March 6, 2021, https://www.preceptaustin.org/the_attributes_of_god_-_spurgeon.

24. "Great Is Thy Faithfulness," Hymnary.org, accessed March 6, 2021, https://hymnary.org/text/great_is_thy_faithfulness_o_god_my_fathe.

25. Boice, *Foundation of the Christian Faith*, 126.

26. "40. hagios," *Bible Hub*, date accessed March 6, 2021, <https://biblehub.com/greek/40.htm>.

Second, humanity is sinful. Paul writes to the believers in Rome that all of mankind has sinned and will never reach God's standard.²⁷ John Gill further explains that man's current status is stained by sin: "This is the general character of all mankind; all have sinned in Adam, are guilty by his sin, polluted with it, and condemned for it; all are sinners in themselves, and by their won actual transgressions."²⁸ Whether it is the inherit sinful nature passed down from Adam or transgressions that an individual has made, all humanity has failed to attain a holy and perfect life. Due to God's holiness and man's sinfulness, separation occurred and affected man's relationship with God.²⁹

The third piece of redemption from sin is the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Because no man could live up to the standard of holiness, God Himself had to be the sole source of redemption. The author of Hebrews concludes that the sacrifice of man could not justify themselves before God.³⁰ Instead, God's wrath would be satisfied being poured out on Jesus, because of His perfection and holiness.³¹ The crucifixion of Jesus offers propitiation through one's faith, which in turn reconciles a man to God.³² Dr. Vernon Whaley notes that Jesus Christ's sacrifice was eternal: "Though we are sinners, and God still has no tolerance for sin, He now looks at us through Christ's finished work on the cross."³³ God is equally just as He is

27. Romans 3:23.

28. Bible Hub, "Romans 3:23," Commentaries, accessed March 6, 2021, <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/romans/3-23.htm>.

29. Psalm 5:5.

30. Hebrews 10:1, 4.

31. Isaiah 53:4-5, 10.

32. Romans 3:25.

33. Vernon Whaley, *Called to Worship: From the Dawn of Creation to the Final Amen*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2009): 307.

Holy.³⁴ Therefore, God dealt with sin accordingly to His standards of holiness, but nonetheless made a way for man to enter into a right relationship with Him.

Resurrection of Christ

The Gospel of Jesus Christ does not stop at the atonement of sins on Calvary Hill. It continues after Christ's death, as He was raised three days after His crucifixion.³⁵ It was at this precise moment that Jesus, the Son of God, defeated both sin and death. John writes that he saw the Messiah holding the keys to both death and hell.³⁶ Pastor David Guzik continues to say that "Jesus is the one who lives, and was dead, and is alive forever more... The victory that Jesus won over sin and death was a permanent victory."³⁷ Those who call upon the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation no longer have to fear sin and death, for Christ ultimately has the victory.³⁸

The resurrection of Christ is also celebratory due to its impact on the eternal destinies of believers. Anyone who believes in the salvation of Jesus Christ not only receive complete atonement for their sins, thus restoring their access to God; believers will also be raised in Christ's name from death to life. In the context of baptism, Paul explains that believers were buried with Jesus in death in order to display the glory of God the Father through resurrection.³⁹ Paul continues his thought in Romans 8, noting "if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your moral

34. Psalm 89:14.

35. Luke 24:7.

36. Revelation 1:18.

37. David Guzik, "Revelation 1," Enduring Word, date accessed March 6, 2021, <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/revelation-1/>.

38. 2 Timothy 1:10.

39. Romans 6:4.

bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.”⁴⁰ For those who follow Christ Jesus, there is a reason to worship, for each has been restored from death to life. If there is celebration in the Savior’s death, there must be celebration in the Savior’s resurrection.⁴¹

The Significance of the Cross in Worship

Due to the work of Christ on the cross, man no longer goes through rituals of sacrifice to enter into God’s presence. Instead, Jesus is the Way to God because He is the ultimate sacrifice and thus the final mediator between God and man. Christ endured the wrath of God, even though He was innocent and blameless.⁴² It was on Calvary’s cross that Christ became the substitute to receive the punishment on behalf of men. Enduring the wrath of God included separation from God, which believers no longer have to suffer.⁴³ Disciples respond in worship, not as an effort to gain access to the presence of God, but rather in response to Jesus being the Way. Christian author Bob Kauflin emphasizes that “only Christ’s work on the cross ensures our complete and immediate access to God.”⁴⁴ It is solely because of the crucifixion that mankind has direct access to a relationship with the living God.⁴⁵

In the process of being reconciled to God through Jesus Christ, believers enter in a relationship with the Lord that is comparable to a father and his child. Paul writes in Galatians that through faith in Jesus Christ, men shall be called children of God.⁴⁶ Just as a child looks up

40. Romans 8:11.

41. Romans 5:10.

42. 2 Corinthians 5:21.

43. Matthew 27:46.

44. Bob Kauflin, *Worship Matters*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 73.

45. Hebrews 10:19.

46. Galatians 3:26.

to his father as a hero, so do followers of Christ in a deeper way. As mentioned previously, Jesus suffered the wrath of God in order for mankind to be reconciled back to his Creator. Man, who was once separated by God because of sin, now is reconciled to Him through the blood of Jesus Christ.⁴⁷ The motivation behind all the wondrous cross of Christ may never be fully comprehended by man until he sees Him face to face; however, it is written that “God is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish but everyone to come to repentance..”⁴⁸ John reminds us that He loved us first, because God Himself is the embodiment of love.⁴⁹ It is a true shift in perspective when a believer remembers that everything that God is and does is founded in His holy love. God desires and wants a relationship each one of his image bearers, and He went to extreme lengths for that relationship, specifically death on a cross.⁵⁰

Responding in Faith

If a believer truly holds firm to the character of God and the works and miracles of God, one may find more reasons to engage in a worshipful lifestyle. During trials and circumstances, disciples of God are given the opportunity to claim truth over fear, thus deepening their faith in the Lord.⁵¹ It is during the challenges of this lifetime where trust and faith are sharpened, so that the believer may continue to run the race with the strength of the Lord.

Renewing of the Minds

A popular citation from Paul’s letter to the Romans are the first two verses of chapter twelve. Renewing the mind is an important principle in the worship lifestyle. If one accepts the

47. Colossians 1:20-22.

48. 2 Peter 3:9.

49. 1 John 4:8, 19.

50. Philippians 2:8.

51. 1 Peter 1:6-7.

salvation from Christ, the battleground of the mind will be a long and tiresome battle. What governs the human mind is so important, that the decision results in life or death. Romans 8:6 confirms that the “mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace.”⁵² Jesus explains that the Holy Spirit is to be a helper to those who proclaim Christ as Lord. Part of the Holy Spirit’s role is help Christians “grow to become all God intended [mankind] to be.”⁵³ One way that the Holy Spirit is a helper is mentioned in the Gospel of John:

But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.⁵⁴

Catherine Marshal illustrates that the Holy Spirit becomes “the living Repository of my memory and my mind.”⁵⁵ In the middle of anxiety, believers can trust that the Spirit will bring to mind important truths that are applicable to that specific situation. Another way that the Spirit plays a pivotal role in the renewing of the mind is his power to changes undesirable habits and patterns. Once a person accepts Christ as his personal Lord and Savior, once he chooses to be baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a man then receives the newness of life.⁵⁶ Part of this newness of life includes the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and walking daily with God in all aspects of life. “Until the Spirit is thus tabernacling with us, the newness of life of which the Apostle Paul so often spoke will be mere theory and will elude us.”⁵⁷ It is through the lifetime

52. Romans 8:6.

53. Elmer L. Towns, *The Ultimate Guide to the Names of God; Three Bestsellers in One Volume*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Bethany House Publishers, 2014): 205.

54. John 14:26.

55. Catherine Marshall, *The Helper: He Will Meet Your Every Need*, (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1978): 140.

56. Romans 6:4.

57. Marshall, *The Helper*, 151.

process of sanctification with the power of the Holy Spirit that the human mind can switch from meditations of earthly things to eternal things, such as those listed in Philippians 4:8-9.

The Element of Remembrance

While the Word encourages believers to look forward to the Lord doing new things, it is important to keep the practice of remembrance in the Christian faith.⁵⁸ The practice of remembering how God worked throughout history is seen throughout both the Old and New Testaments. Psalm 106 criticizes the Israelites who too quickly forgot how the Lord worked in their midst. Jesus strongly encourages the disciples to remember the crucifixion during the Last Supper.⁵⁹ Paul encourages the Philippians to meditate on anything worthy of praise.⁶⁰ Because the Lord has chosen to reveal Himself to believers through His word, believers have access to recount and reflect on God's past victories in times of deliverance and protection. This is a way for the body of Christ to instill the faithfulness of God.

Worship as a Weapon

In times where anxiety rises, it is important to remember the martial aspect of worship. In addition to being a proper response to a Holy God, it also acts as a weapon in spiritual warfare. A prime example of this is seen in the Old Testament book of Chronicles. The Lord delivers Judah not by strengthening the army. Instead, it is the praise of the Lord that moves Him to compassion, giving victory to the Israelites. In this moment and others, expressing the praise of the Lord during trials show the complete denial of humanity's strength as a defense or hope.⁶¹ Instead, it displays the complete trust of God as a sole refuge and defense against all enemies and

58. Isaiah 43:18-19.

59. 1 Corinthians 11:17-32.

60. Philippians 4:8-9.

61. Matthew 16:24.

challenges that may arise.⁶² Praising God in the battles does not equate to weakness. On the contrary, admitting weakness in humanity allows the fullness of God's strength to be present, as mankind turns to fully depend on the Living God as protector and provider.⁶³

Group Based Counseling Therapy and Small Groups

As mental health awareness is becoming more relevant, the need for therapist and counseling has significantly increased over the past decade. In a ten-year period, the call for a therapist to treat rising mental health rates in college aged students increased from 19% to 34%.⁶⁴ One of the leading forms of therapy in response to the rise in anxiety is group-based counseling therapy (GCBT). In a 2009 case study, GCBT was used for a pool of participants who had a wide range of anxiety disorders. In the twenty 90-minute meetings, participants were able to encourage one another throughout the session.⁶⁵ Not only does this show that group therapy is a beneficial treatment for those who struggle with general anxiety disorder (GAD), but it further confirms the positive correlation between encouragement through fellow patients and reduced anxiety symptoms.

GCBT is similar in how many churches hold their small groups. A leader guides a group of church congregants in a discussion, hoping that each person can act as a voice piece for others as well as receive information they need to grow. In this group setting, it allows all the participants to benefit from transformative learning. This is a practice that includes "a supportive

62. Proverbs 18:10.

63. 2 Corinthians 12:9-11.

64. Sarah Ketchen Lipson, Emily G. Lattie, and Daniel Eisenberg, "Increased Rates of Mental Health Service Utilization by U.S. College Students: 10-Year Population-Level Trends (2007–2017)," *Psychiatry Services*, vol. 70, no. 1 (January 2019): 60-63. <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ps.201800332>.

65. Daniel J. van Ingen and David J. Novicki, "An Effectiveness Study of Group Therapy for Anxiety Disorders," abstract, *International Journal of Group Psychotherapy*, vol. 59, no. 2 (Sarasota, FL: 2009) 243.

group and a supportive environment” throughout the therapeutic journey.⁶⁶ Some of the benefits of group therapy include providing a safe environment where transformative learning is encouraged, supporting each person during the hard parts of the counseling, and holding one another accountable throughout the sessions.⁶⁷ Another therapeutic structure that is worth noting is Alcoholics Anonymous. Members of AA have “the desire to escape from the death spiral of alcoholism” and thus are committed to chasing sobriety against the addiction.⁶⁸ It is the anonymity environment of the group that promotes growth,⁶⁹ for there is less pressure to show up and perform to a certain standard.

The Role of Music

A common thought amongst music therapists includes the relieving factor that music offers to individuals when they are put in anxious or stressful environments. In 2001, the American Music Therapy Association held a study where participants were asked to prepare a presentation in which one group prepped with music while the control prepped in silence. It is in this case study that “patients consistently report that they feel less stressed when music is present... [reporting] lower levels of state anxiety in the presence of music than its absence.”⁷⁰ Amongst the many variations and mediums that music may present itself, the best choice for

66. J. Mezirow, “Learning to Think like an Adult: Core Concepts of Transformation theory,” (2000), quoted in Mariet Mikaelian, “The Transformative Learning Experiences of Southern California Church-Based Small Group Members,” *Christian Education Journal* vol. 15, no. 2 (Los Angeles CA: Sage Journals 2018): 173.

67. Mikaelian, “The Transformative Learning Experiences of Southern California Church-Based Small Group Members,” 183.

68. Kent Dunnington, “Small Groups Anonymous: Why the Best Church Small Groups Might Take Their Cues from the Twelve Steps,” *Christianity Today*, (May 2019), 53.

69. Paula Helm, “What can self-organised group therapy teach us about anonymity?,” *Ephemera Journal of Theory & Politics in Organization*, no. 17, vol. 2, (2017), 364.

70. Wendy E. J. Knight and Nikki S. Rickard, “Relaxing Music Prevents Stress-Induced Increases in Subjective Anxiety, Systolic Blood Pressure, and Heart Rate in Healthy Males and Females”, *Journal of Music Therapy*, no. 38, vol. 4 (2001): 12.

showing promising results of relaxing were tracks with minimum complexity in arrangement, few dramatic changes (sudden changes in dynamics, melodic lines, or key modulations).⁷¹

In specific relations between music therapy and GAD, studies have shown a reduction in pretreatment and post treatment results using the Beck Anxiety Inventory.⁷² In a 2015 case study, results of music therapy as a solution to GAD positive impacted the physical symptoms of anxiety (reports of decreased cortisol, a process which can reduce symptoms of anxiety) in addition to enhancing other brain functions (such as memory and attention).⁷³

Biblical Worldview

Anxiety

It is important to remember that if one confesses his sin and proclaims Christ as Lord and Savior, he has access through the Holy Spirit to see things from a biblical worldview.⁷⁴ The word *anxiety* comes from the Greek word *merimna*, which is translated back as “dividing and fracturing a person’s being into parts.”⁷⁵ Another conjugation of the word is *merimnaó*, which can be imagined as worry pulling apart one’s being in different directions.⁷⁶ Other translations include care or worries, particularly related to this earthly life.⁷⁷

71. Dave Elliot, Remco Polman, and Richard McGregor, “Relaxing Music for Anxiety Control,” *Journal of Music Therapy*, no. 48, vol. 3, 280.

72. Enrique Octavio Flores Gutiérrez and Víctor Andrés Terán Camaren, “Music therapy in generalized anxiety disorder,” *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, vol. 44 (Del. Tlalpan, México: 2015), 23.

73. Gutiérrez, “Music therapy in generalized anxiety disorder,” 23.

74. Ephesians 1:18.

75. “3308. merimna,” *Bible Hub*, date accessed February 14, 2021. <https://biblehub.com/greek/3308.htm>.

76. “3309. merimnaó,” *Bible Hub*, date accessed February 14, 2021. <https://biblehub.com/greek/3309.htm>.

77. “3308. merimna,” *Bible Hub*, date accessed February 14, 2021. <https://biblehub.com/greek/3308.htm>.

Here are some common Bible verses that Christians reference when anxiety is brought up into the conversation. It is important to look at what God is saying in context versus how the modern-day church uses it to aid those who suffer with GAD.

Philippians 4:6

When the conversation of anxiety is brought up in a faith-based community, one of the most common responses is quoting the Apostle Paul in his letter to the city of Philippi: do not be anxious.⁷⁸ When this verse is used as a response to someone responding to anxiety, it transforms anxiety from a deeply engrained neurological pathway to a substance that that appears to have an on/off switch That is not the case. However, this verse on its own at first sounds commanding and impossible to fulfill for anyone, let alone an anxious person. Instead, to put this verse in context, it is imperative to observe the overarching theme of Philippians from beginning to verse six of chapter four. Chapter One starts with the theme of *To Live is Christ*. Following is Chapter Two with an emphasis on Christ's humility, and thus encouraging His followers to do the same. Chapter Three is about the righteousness of Christ given to His believers through His work alone, which is our strength and perseverance for *Straining Toward the Goal*. For these reasons, chapter four comes to an end with praising Jesus for the former things mentioned. It is in this context of understanding the lordship of Christ, the power in His humility, the riches gained from His work alone, and the true source of strength and perseverance that allows one the opportunity to not be anxious. The inerrancy of the Bible must be upheld as a core foundation of the Christian faith; however, the application of Scripture must go further than just a mere recitation of a verse out of its total context.

78. Philippians 4:6.

Matthew 6:25

This verse is from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Out of context, this verse may be addressing a person who seems materialistic, and or at least concerned with the things of this world. Verse 25 starts with the word *therefore*, which indicates that the proceeding information is the foundation to verse 25 and on. The previous part of the sermon warns people against hoarding their treasures on earth and encourages them to store them up in heaven.⁷⁹ Once it is understood that it is more valuable to store up treasures in heaven versus here on earth, it is understandable why Jesus would continue His sermon with Matthew 6:25 and on. If money or materialism dims in comparison to the glory and light of God, it is easy to not be worried about the things of this world.⁸⁰ Such a believer trusts the one who is control of it all, and that would be God who is sovereign and just over all.

Music

Even from early biblical times, the essence of music and music making was recognized in both God-fearing and secular cultures. Throughout the time of Kings and Chronicles, David and others wrote Psalms to be presented before the Lord as worship. Paul in Ephesians encourages the church to speak with one another hymns, psalms, and spiritual songs.⁸¹ Although music as a medium of worship is mentioned very few times in the New Testament compared to the Old Testament, it is still an important element in our worship to God.

Through music, an individual is able to express God-given emotions. A prominent place in Scripture to look at is the Psalms. Pastor Dane C. Orlund writes that “the Psalms are *deeply*

79. Matthew 6:19-24.

80. Matthew 6:25.

81. Ephesians 5:19.

aware of the diversity of human emotions and experience.”⁸² Through the various themes of the psalms, believers today can see what it is like to connect a range of emotions with worship of God in the form of song. From rejoicing in the Lord, to fear of circumstances, from tiredness of a weary soul, to an anxious mindset, there are many examples of expressing one’s God-given emotions back to the One who created them; all of which are done through the medium of a psalm.

In addition, each person of the Trinity uses the medium of song and music as a form of expression.⁸³ In Zephaniah, the Father sings over the children of Israel.⁸⁴ In the Gospels, Jesus and the disciples sing in the Upper Room during the Passover Meal.⁸⁵ In the Epistles, the Holy Spirit fills believers with hymns, spirituals, and psalms to sing unto one another, for the purpose of edification.⁸⁶ God in all three persons set the examples for His image bearers to use music as a form of expression and communication.

Finally, the use of music heightens one’s memory of who God is and what He is doing in the lives of His people. Zac Hicks comments on the ease to remember and recite song lyrics in weekly church services: “Many [congregants] have pointed out that when people walk away from a worship service, they carry with them, more than anything else, the songs.”⁸⁷ The connection between music and remembrance can also be seen in the Old Testament, when God

82. Dane C. Ortlund, “How The Psalms Speak to All of Our Emotions,” *Crossway*, accessed March 6, 2021, <https://www.crossway.org/articles/how-the-psalms-speak-to-all-of-our-emotions/>.

83. Kauflin, *Worship Matters*, 99.

84. Zephaniah 3:17.

85. Matthew 26:30.

86. Ephesians 5:18-19.

87. Zac Hicks, *The Worship Pastor: A Call to Ministry for Worship Leaders and Teams*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 72.

commanded Moses to write a song for Israel. God intends for the song of remembrance to “confront [the people of Israel] as a witness (for it will live unforgotten in the mouths of their offspring).”⁸⁸ Music as a tool of remembrance can encourage the body of Christ to use it in aiding the meditation of God’s goodness, promises, and character. If it is internalized through the medium of music, lessons of God’s faithfulness during trials and sovereignty over the unknown can be recalled in times of need.

Conclusion of Targeted Literature Review

After reviewing case studies about anxiety, reviewing the benefits of small groups, studying the role of music in therapeutic settings, and understanding the biblical worldview of these ideals, the following creative project will aid in answering this question: In what way can the Church use the combined mediums of music therapy and biblical counseling to better shepherd and encourage its college-aged congregants to live a worshipful lifestyle amidst the trials of anxiety?

Composition of the Creative Project

Revelation through Devotionals

This part of the study should be completed on an individual basis, which includes reviewing the devotional reading portion of each week’s content apart from the group setting. There are be eight devotionals written out that include Scripture, word studies, and interpretation. There are also questions for a person to think and contemplate, separate from the group discussion questions. Additional space is included for any questions, notes, or responses a person may have to the text. This eight-part study is to mimic a twelve-step program, giving the reader eight applicable ideals in order combat anxiety. During the progression of the devotional study,

88. Deuteronomy 31:21.

these themes will build upon one another and earlier ones should be kept in practice. It is intentional that the study is designed in a way that it can be repeated: once topic eight is covered, the reader can easily cycle back to the first week's topic, if desired.

Edification through Discussions

Group discussion is one of the positive reinforcements from GCBT sessions. Taking this element and using it to build up one another in a time of healing and growth is vital to this group devotional study. The purpose for these discussion questions is to encourage members of the small group to build trust and communication over the time spent together. Eventually, the answers to each others' questions will naturally be part of the conversation at hand. It is imperative that all parties are able to be vulnerable and offer supportive responses and encouragement for this devotional study to work. A requirement for establishing an open dialogue between group members is the assurance of confidentiality. Creating a safe space amongst all the participants is an essential foundation to group discussion. If one person feels hesitate to be vulnerable, that will affect the rest of the devotional group, prompting others to also be closed-minded.

Response through Music

There will be times for both active and passive music therapy. During the dialogue of the weekly reading, discussion questions, and the counseling activity, the leader of the small group may decide to play relaxing, calming music in the background. At the end of each lesson will be a list of songs related to the respective week's topic. This is intended to be an intentional time of gathered worship amongst the study group. This active music therapy can use pre-recorded tracks or a live instrumentalist for this portion of the study. The suggested type of music would be acoustic guitar or piano driven, with minimal drums, electric guitar lead, or heavy synths.

Release through Counseling Activities

In order to personalize each week's theme to an individual, activities are written to reflect each week's content, allowing a time to interact with the written material in a group setting. The purpose of this section is to have a physical representation of acting out or practicing the week's lesson. Some examples of the activities include breathing exercises, writing a letter, praying with another group member, and writing our positive and biblical truths out as daily reminders.

Contributions to Knowledge

After the completion of the study, local churches will have the opportunity to play a more active role in addressing the rise in anxiety amongst college age students. The goal is to offer the local church a class program to be held one or twice a year, with the target participation group its college-aged congregants.

Other potential studies would include the study of: male versus female students, which majors have more symptoms of anxiety compared to others, the comparison of an older sibling student and a younger sibling student, and comparison of demographics. The variable of active versus passive music is another variable that may be changed to encourage growth. Finally, with the effects of COVID-19 and limited gathering restrictions, hosting this group in person versus virtually will mostly likely change the results, thus calling for more interactive material within the devotional itself.

Focus Group Study Recommendations

If this topic were to be further studied, a focus group of this devotional-study would be the next step. Once participations have agreed to commit to the mock trial of the church program, research will be conducted in a three-fold process. The first step of the process will be to analyze the pre-existing levels and symptoms of anxiety. This will take a form similar to the DASS-21

survey. Participants will take a pre-class questionnaire to collect and analyze data, such as daily time in the Word, how each one lives a worship-filled lifestyle, anxiety triggers, and current strategies to reduce symptoms.

The second step will be to run the class as if the program was being conducted by a local church. There will be one small group leader who facilitates the weekly meetings, leads discussions through the weekly material, and challenges, builds, strengthens, and equips participants with tools to combat anxiety and its symptoms. This will go on for the length of the class.

Once the class is completed, participants will fill out a post questionnaire, again based off of the DASS-21 survey. There will also be a feedback portion of the form to see how the program can be tailored to college age students.

It would be ideal that the person leading this mock focus group is a licensed counselor who is a Christian. While the goal of this devotional may be to have an associate pastor or small group leader be in charge of it, it may be profitable to have an experienced therapist to lead the devotional, to ensure the safety and professionalism within the small group.

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