

stressed OUT

A PRACTICAL,
BIBLICAL APPROACH
TO ANXIETY



TODD
FRIEL

WHAT OTHERS ARE SAYING . . .

Todd Friel is a wealth of wonderful wisdom; an oasis of biblical truth in a desert of shallow theology. *Stressed Out* is drawn from a well that will refresh your soul.

Ray Comfort, CEO/Founder, LivingWaters.com

Todd Friel has done the Church a great service. Pastors, counselors, and church leaders will receive a great deal of help from this practical guide on some of the most debilitating issues in a believer's life. As our times become increasingly troubling and stressful, *Stressed Out* is a perfect antidote.

Pastor Emilio Ramos, Heritage Grace Community Church

The word “worry” is derived from the old English word “wyrgran.” It means “to strangle.” Worry harasses you and grabs you by the throat. Worry chokes. Todd properly analyzes the problem, lovingly identifies worry for what it is, then pushes your attention to the true solution. If you would like some biblical relief from the vice grips of the vice of worry, *Stressed Out* beats a straitjacket every time.

Mike Abendroth, Pastor of Bethlehem Bible Church

and host of *No Compromise Radio*

While depression and anxiety are sweeping the nation in epidemic proportions, there is hope to be found. Todd Friel has written a very biblical and accessible book to aid the weary sufferer. Drawing heavily from the Gospels, he is able to bring helpful prescriptions from the Lord Jesus — the Great Physician. *Stressed Out* is laced with Friel's unique brand of wit, along with his nurturing heart. This book is a great resource for the Church, and a joy to read.

Nate Pickowicz, Pastor of Harvest Bible Church

If you're currently struggling with the storms that rage in an anxious heart, this book offers concrete, authentic and wonderfully biblical help. Buy this book.

Pastor Lyndon Unger, writer at TheCrippleGate.com

When Christians experience anxiety, we should acknowledge that we are not trusting in God and the teachings of His Word in the way that we should. When it happens, we should remember that God has the wisdom and power to overcome anxious thoughts, which in reality are an effect of the Fall (Genesis 3), and we can have victory in Him. Todd's new book offers hope as it helps you discover how to become conformed to the image of God's Son, including how your thinking can be transformed through the power of God's Word — starting with its very first verse.

Ken Ham, President/CEO, Answers in Genesis

Stressed Out is undoubtedly one of the most powerful, practical, and biblical books ever written on the subject of anxiety. I would even dare say that it's refreshingly revolutionary. You will breathe multiple sighs of relief as you read through its pages, and when you're done, you will delightfully find yourself reveling in an unspeakable joy that will give birth to a God-honoring calm in your heart, and exuberant worship in your life. Read it! Live it! Share it!"

Emeal ("E.Z.") Zwayne, President, Living Waters

As someone who has previously struggled through anxiety, I am very pleased that *Stressed Out* gently and surgically uses the soothing balm of Scripture to illustrate that the only appropriate remedy to this malady is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. Unlike previous works on this subject, Mr. Friel has provided Christians laden with anxiety an indelible resource in recognizing and resting in the one true God and the eternal peace which comes only in His unwavering glorification.

*Landon Chapman, owner/writer,
EntreatingFavor.com; host, FireAway! Podcast*

Worry is one of the great obstacles that hinders our Christian effectiveness and service. *Stressed Out* not only helps us understand what anxiety is, but it also provides seasoned advice of how to deal with it from a biblical perspective. Straight-forward and direct, Todd Friel offers practical advice for those who deal with this debilitating enemy of life. Don't stress out, read this book!

Steven J. Lawson, President, OnePassion Ministries, Dallas, TX

Anxiety is a crippling emotion. People caught in the grip of gloom or struggling under the weight of worry naturally feel trapped and helpless. Christians contending with feelings of fear and melancholy often bear the twin burdens of guilt and shame as well. After all, Philippians 4:6 is one of the most familiar commands in the New Testament: "Be anxious for nothing."

But overcoming anxiety is not as simple as turning off a spigot. Those inclined to live by their natural feelings will simply succumb to brooding inactivity. There are solid biblical remedies for this malady, and they involve all the same means of grace that energize our sanctification. In this brilliant and wonderfully written book, Todd Friel clearly identifies and explains the biblical answers to the problem of anxiety. If you are frustrated in the quest for freedom from fear, or if you are trying to help someone who is afflicted with negative emotions, this book is just the right balance of encouragement, instruction, and biblical wisdom.

Phil Johnson, Executive Director, Grace to You Ministries

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TODD FRIEL

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Please note, this book is not attempting to offer medical advice. Before you make any decisions about beginning or eliminating any medication, you should consult your physician and your pastor to carefully make this decision.

INTRODUCTION

Start having hope right now. God is willing and able to fix your anxiety problem. He has done it for millions of people and He will do it for you too. You have His word on it. God is an anxiety expert. He has seen countless cases of “depression” and He would say to you, “Bring it on. I am ready, willing, and able to overcome your struggle.”

Thankfully, God is not a physician with a crabby bedside manner; He delights in helping His children live an anxiety-free life. If you are willing to let your Great Physician diagnose and cure you, your anxiety will go away. You may have an occasional flare-up, but God can and will make you whole.

Jesus once asked a man who had been ill for almost four decades what seems like a peculiar question.

A man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there, and knew that he had already been a long time in that condition, He said to him, “**Do you wish to get well?**” (John 5:5–6).¹

Why would Jesus ask what appears to be a no-brainer? Surprisingly, there are people who don’t want to get well.

- Some people don’t think they are ill.
- Some people like the attention that illness brings.
- Some people grow comfortable with their illness.
- Some people don’t like to make the effort necessary to be healed.

May I ask you, “Do you wish to get well?” If you do, then God is prepared to help you live a truly abundant life (John 10:10). If you are willing to do

1. The Bible was not originally written on a computer. The inspired writers of the Bible had neither emoticons, italics, nor bold lettering. As you read the Bible verses contained in this book, you will notice that I have bolded words or thoughts to highlight them. Do not expect to see these in bold in your Bible.

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some potentially uncomfortable self-examination and apply God's cure, then Jesus has a promise for you:

If you continue in **My word**, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will **make you free** (John 8:31–32).

That is an offer we just shouldn't refuse! Is there a string attached? Yes, but it is not a chain with an anchor. You must be willing to "continue in His Word." You must find your diagnosis, prognosis, and cure in the Word of God. That means you must abandon other means that we often look to:

- > Messages are not going to help you.
- > Talk therapy is not going to help you.
- > Sleeping pills are not going to help you.
- > Coffee clutches are not going to help you.
- > Thinking happy thoughts is not going to help you.
- > Applying secular psychology is not going to help you.

None of these methods will remove your anxiety. God's methods will, and they are a lot cheaper than a day at the spa. If you are prepared to dive into His Word, submit to God and take His medicine, then Jesus will set you free from your anxiety.

Are you ready? Are you ready to be set free? Are you ready to understand why you feel the way you do? Are you ready to get to the root of your concerns? Are you ready to start thinking and feeling the way God designed you to? Are you ready to be changed in ways you can't imagine?

SECTION 1:

UNDERSTANDING ANXIETY

CHAPTER 1

YOUR ISSUE

If you go to a medical doctor with a sprained toe and tell him your elbow hurts, you will get a prescription, some exercises, and a nifty elbow brace, but your toe will not get the help it needs. The same thing is true for your emotions.

Emotions are tricky things and it is very easy to mislabel what you are feeling. No single word can accurately define an individual's emotions. Consider the nuances to the following words alone: anger, frustration, disappointment, irritation, resentment. These words are related, but each definition has a slightly different shade. That is what makes self-diagnosis so difficult.

Too often we self-diagnose our emotional issues and because we misdiagnose them, we never really heal. If you have wrestled with anxiety for a long time, most likely it is because you have not rightly understood the biblical explanation for anxiety.

If you start a journey headed in the wrong direction, you are not going to arrive at your destination. Even if you are off by an inch when you begin, you will be off by miles after a long journey and you will never get where you want to go.

How can we avoid making that mistake with anxiety? We must let the Great Physician examine us and make a biblical diagnosis. How does He do that? God examines and diagnoses us, and offers the cure through His Word.

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for **correction**, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, **equipped** for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

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How kind of God to provide us with a manual that has everything we need to live an anxiety-free life. We don't need the secular Diagnostic Statistical Manual that changes every few years. We need to trust the Word of God that never changes.

Best of all, when God examines us through His Word, there are no copays, no awkward conversations with a stranger, and we don't have to wear one of those dopey robes that tie in the back.

God will work with you privately and lovingly to apply His cure for your anxiety.

ORGANIC ANXIETY

Your wayward emotions can be neatly placed into one of two major categories: organic or non-organic.

Most likely, you are not suffering from organic depression. Even if the Diagnostic Statistical Manual categorizes your emotional challenge as clinical depression, you probably have nothing more than a common case of anxiety, which is very curable. But that doesn't mean we shouldn't take some time to make sure your issue is not chemical or physiological.

DIAGNOSING ORGANIC DEPRESSION

Imagine walking into a doctor's office suffering from a stabbing pain in your back. You are sitting on a table covered with white paper when the doctor walks in and starts asking you questions. In fact, that is all he does; he only asks you questions. He doesn't examine you. He doesn't perform any blood tests. He orders no x-rays or MRIs. He merely inquires about your pain and then writes you a prescription. That doctor has not done his job. Doctors should examine a patient scientifically and then determine a diagnosis.

When it comes to diagnosing clinical depression, the scientific approach is thrown out the window because there is not a scientific method for determining depression. Depression is typically diagnosed based on presenting symptoms, which is the very opposite of the scientific deductive method.

Virtually every prescription written for depression is based on presenting symptoms without any scientific evaluation. That is why *The Journal of Clinical Psychology* recently revealed that 69 percent of antidepressant users never even met the DSM V criteria for major depressive disorder.

A psychology professor at Vanderbilt University who conducted extensive research on the effectiveness of antidepressants said, “I would say at least half the folks who are being treated with antidepressants aren’t benefiting from the active pharmacological effects of the drugs themselves but from a placebo effect.”¹

Dr. Charles Hodges believes that less than 10 percent of depression diagnoses qualify as genuine organic illness. That should cause us to proceed with a great deal of caution before pursuing a medical solution to a non-medical problem.

There are some tests that can offer evidence of organic depression, but there are no conclusive scientific methods. Brain scans, along with hair, blood, and urinalysis tests can help determine if you have a physical issue that medicine might help. This testing is not nearly as sophisticated as we would like, but these should be considered before accepting a diagnosis of clinical depression.

There may be other physical reasons that can cause depression. Menstrual cycles, menopause, eating habits, lack of exercise or sunlight, alcohol consumption, low testosterone, weight issues, lack of REM sleep, vitamin deficiencies, or the side effects of other medications could be the source of your depressed emotions. These issues should also be addressed before you pursue a psychotropic prescription. The cure to your depressed mood may be as simple as getting more Vitamin D.

THE BLACK DOG

Winston Churchill may or may not have been the originator of the phrase “a black dog howling” to describe depression, but it sure does describe the condition well. A black dog sits on the chest of its victim and howls unrelentingly.

When the black dog howls, the sufferer can hardly breathe, let alone spring out of bed and bound off to work. The black dog of depression is felt in the bones. The black dog knocks a person off his feet, onto his back, and takes him out of the game of life.

The black dog constantly nips at the heels of its prey. Dark thoughts echo in the brain. Thoughts of death come easily. A desire to escape society,

1. www.psychiatrist.com/jcp/article/Pages/2015/v76n01/v76n0106.aspx, <http://www.apa.org/monitor/2012/06/prescribing.aspx>.

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family, and even life itself consume the thoughts of the quarry of the unleashed black dog.

The black dog that powerfully depresses one's emotions can even attack Christians. Charles Spurgeon, the Prince of Preachers, suffered from a sporadic form of devastating melancholy.

Being sad on occasion is not depression. Being worried about the future is not depression. Having a random dark thought is not depression. But a black dog may be a sign that you have a physiological condition that may be helped by medication.

Psychotropic drugs should be taken only with great wisdom, much research, and knowledge that these medicines are the least scientific of all medical prescriptions. The brain is staggeringly complex, and psychotropics are diagnosed like a dart game. Prescribing depression medicine is more of a guessing game than a science. Be very, very careful. Psychotropic medicine has many potentially severe side effects.

Having said that, if a Christian is hounded by the black dog, or is genuinely plagued with an organic issue (as best we can tell), medicine can be received as a blessing from God. Just because depression has been wildly over-diagnosed does not mean a Christian cannot avail himself of psychiatric medicine. Just make sure you receive wise medical and biblical counsel before you take any psychotropic medication.

NO SHAME

If any Christian shames you for requiring and utilizing psychotropic drugs, offer them grace and know that you are not sinning.

Your brain is an organ that can malfunction like any other organ. Born-again Christians can be assaulted by the black dog. Read that sentence again. Bible-believing Christians can experience debilitating depression and they should not feel ashamed, and they certainly should not feel like they are not saved.

Would you be embarrassed to tell someone you have high cholesterol? Would you be ashamed to reveal you have had your gallbladder removed? Then you should not blush if you have a genuine organic brain issue.

You are not your brain. Your brain is not what makes you, you. You are a spiritual being with a body. Your brain connects your spirit to the physical realm. Your brain processes, stores, reasons, and thinks, but your brain is

not you. And just like any other organ, our brains can fail to function at normal levels. That is why you should not be ashamed if you experience organic depression.

TWO TRUTHS

If you do have a physiological reason for depression, there are two truths we would do well to consider. First, being diagnosed with organic depression does not mean we can blame our brains for our anxiety on the brain. A brain that is not functioning perfectly is not the cause of our anxiety; it simply reveals the anxiety that is already present in our members.

Did you catch that? Even if you have organic depression, you cannot excuse anxious emotions or behaviors because your brain is struggling. We cannot blame anxiety on our brains, but that does not mean we cannot recognize that some brains need help in functioning rightly so a person can overcome anxiety.

The second truth you must remember is that even after taking medication, you will still struggle with non-organic anxiety that needs to be addressed biblically. You will continue to experience anxious thoughts even after you receive the medication you need to bring your emotions under reasonable control. None of us escapes the malady of anxiety.

If you are one of the few people who actually has an organic issue that requires medication to get your thinking under control, you will still need to do battle with the problem that is common to all of us: non-organic anxiety.

NON-ORGANIC ANXIETY

The second category of emotional issues is non-organic. This is where most of us find ourselves. Our brains are operating “normally,” but we still have anxious or blue thoughts.

Non-organic anxiety is the issue that the overwhelming majority of us deal with every single day. This is the type of anxiety that this book seeks to address. Here are some synonyms that help us understand our focus. Do any of these words describe you?

- Worried
- Concerned
- Uneasy
- Fretful
- Nervous
- Apprehensive

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- > Fearful
- > Vexed
- > Agitated
- > Restless
- > Upset
- > Tense
- > Miserable
- > Blue
- > Bothered
- > Troubled
- > On edge
- > Irritable
- > Panicky
- > Sad
- > Gloomy

Great news — if any (or all) of the words in that list describe you, then the Bible has much to say to you.

DO YOU BELIEVE?

Do you believe that God has the power to get your anxious thoughts under control? Then you are in for an adventure. God will not necessarily remove every anxious thought from your mind, but He has the wisdom and strength to help you overcome and have victory over anxiety.

Your sanctifying God doesn't want to put a Band-Aid on your wound, He wants to flush it out and actually heal it. The process may sting a bit, but cleansing inevitably brings healing. Your Great Physician is prepared to diagnose you, give you a prescription, and not just heal you, but make you different. Better. Wiser. Stronger. Happier. Steadier. Healthier. Holier. More Christ-like. Are you ready to receive your diagnosis? Are you ready to receive a biblical prescription? Are you ready to apply the cure? If so, God is ready to change you in profound ways.

The Love of Christ! The Fullness, Freeness, and Immutability
of the Savior's Grace Displayed!

James Smith

Believer, never *repine* at your trials, nor be over-anxious for their *removal*. They are *appointed* by Jesus as your *Purifier* — and are **choice blessings in disguise!**

Seek their sanctification, wrestle with God that you may see His love in every *stroke*, and look to Jesus that you may enjoy His presence when passing through the **flame!**

Nothing can hurt you — while Jesus is near you; and He is never nearer to you — than *when you are in the furnace!* For He sits right there as the *Refiner* . . . watching the process, regulating the heat, and waiting to effect a gracious deliverance — when the *ends* of His love are answered.

He is only preparing you for fresh manifestations of His glory — and fitting you for larger communications of His love.

In the furnace, you will *lose* nothing that is worth keeping — but you will *obtain* what is truly valuable!²

2. James Smith, *The Love of Christ! The Fullness, Freeness, and Immutability of the Savior's Grace Displayed!* Originally published in 1860, emphasis in original, <http://www.gracegems.org/2011/09/purge.html>.