

?

1. What are the things, the people, the situations in my life about which I am anxious?
2. What is the good for which I hope? What are the difficulties about which I fear?
3. How do my anxieties manifest themselves?
4. What are some practical, concrete steps I can take to reduce my anxieties?
5. What are some practical, concrete steps I can take to achieve good, or to deal with my difficulties?
6. Do I pray to God about the source of my anxiety?
7. Is there someone—a friend, a colleague, a professional—with whom I can process the source (s) of my anxiety?
8. Once I've done all that I can, how good am I at "letting go?"



De Sales, Francis. Introduction to the Devout Life. A variety of publishing firms and dates.

Thibert, VHM, Perrone Marie; Wright, Wendy, M.; and Power, OSFS, Joseph F. Francis de Sales, Jane de Chantal: Letters of Spiritual Direction. New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1988.



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What, Me Worry?

**SALESIAN
PERSPECTIVES**



...Managing Anxiety

Have you ever worried about the future? The destiny of a son or daughter, outliving your retirement investments, or caring for an aging, disabled parent?

Have you ever worried about the past? Regretted decisions, broken relationships or unfulfilled dreams?

Have you ever had the experience of being worried about everything in general, but nothing in particular?

If you said “yes,” then you know what it means to be anxious.

“With the exception of sin, anxiety is the greatest evil that can befall us.”

To be sure, there are many things in our lives that cause us to be anxious: regrets about the past, uncertainties about the future, and everything in between. But, anxiety can be as bad – or sometimes even worse – than the things about which we were worried in the first place.

The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language (Houghton Mifflin, 1992) defines anxiety as “a state of intense apprehension, uncertainty and fear resulting from...a threatening situation or event, often to a degree that the normal physical and psychological functioning of the affected individual is disrupted.”

St. Francis de Sales certainly knew the danger of anxiety. In his Introduction to the Devout Life (1609), he wrote: “Anxiety is the greatest evil that can befall us, sin excepted.”

Strong language. He continued:

“Sedition and internal troubles ruin a nation utterly and prevent it from being able to resist a foreign invasion. Similarly, when we are troubled and restless we lose our power to maintain the virtue that we have acquired. We also lose the means of resisting the temptations of the enemy who then makes every effort to fish, as they say, in troubled waters.”

Anxiety not only hinders us from resisting evil. It can also prevent us from achieving what is good. How many first dates, interviews for a job promotion, or efforts to win that “big” contract have gone up in smoke because of anxiety?

“Anxiety not only hinders us from resisting evil, it can also prevent us from achieving what is good.”

St. Francis de Sales wrote: “Anxiety arises from an inordinate desire to be freed from the evil we experience or to acquire the good for which we hope. Yet there is nothing which so aggravates the evil or impedes the good as anxiety and eagerness.”

Anxiety – inordinate desire - is truly a two-edged sword.

Since it is so much a part of life, how do we deal with it?

St. Jane de Chantal was a contemporary and friend of St. Francis de Sales. In her advice to a woman who had recently been widowed, St. Jane offered her remedy for anxiety: “Try

to calm your passions and inclinations and live according to the sound reason and the holy will of God. Otherwise, you will always be anxious and perturbed.”

St. Francis de Sales wrote: “When you are taken up by a desire to be delivered from some evil or to obtain some good, place yourself above all in peace and tranquility. Compose your judgment and your will. Then, quietly and gently, pursue the object of your desire, taking in order the means that are fitting. And when I say ‘gently,’ I do not mean ‘negligently’ but without eagerness, confusion and anxiety. Otherwise, you will spoil everything.”

“Ask God for the presence of mind and heart to remain centered.”

So, when faced with some sin or setback to avoid, or when striving to obtain some gift or good, remain calm. Ask God for the presence of mind and heart to stay centered, no matter how small or great the temptation to be anxious. Consider what God gives you the courage and ability to do on your own behalf. Consider, too, that which only God can accomplish.

Perhaps St. Jane says it best. “What I mean is that in all your good works you should unite yourself to the Will of God’s good pleasure. In all in your faults and imperfections, you should unite yourself to God’s compassion gently, quietly and with peace of mind.”