7 Anxiety Exercises

SENSORY EXERCISES

When we're anxious, afraid, overwhelmed, or in pain, shifting focus from our circumstances to God can require strength and courage we don't feel. Yet, carrying our anxiety alone allows it to grow into a deep, dark, stagnant well, but when we surrender it to God, He turns it into streams of flowing water: fresh, clear, and life-giving.

Let these seven exercises ground you in the moment. God is waiting for you, ready to take your anxiety and give you His peace.

1. 5-4-3-2-1

Anxiety makes our world spin, knocking us off balance. Naming things draws us back to the present moment. As we name things, we engage our brains in a different way. Is there a story or memory attached to the object, scent, sound, flavor, or texture? *For this exercise, name:*

- 5 Things You Can See — Look for small details, like an interesting pattern, sunlight glinting off a table or through a door, or a photo you haven't noticed recently.
- 4 Things You Can Feel — Notice the qualities of your clothing, the chair you're sitting in, or the object in your hand.
- 3 Things You Can Hear — Listen for the hum of an appliance, leaves rustling in the breeze, birds singing, or people talking.
- 2 Things You Can Smell — Try to identify the fragrances of things like freshly brewed coffee, a clean towel, or scented soap.
- 1 Thing You Can Taste — Take a bite or a sip of something and savor the flavor. Describe the taste.

2. A WATCHFUL WALK

Take a slow and watchful walk. Focus on each step, notice the details around you as you walk.

- What colors stand out? Do they surprise you?
- What catches your attention? Why?
- What do you hear? How many sounds can you identify?
- What sensations do you feel? Consider the weather, the surface you're walking on, and the way your clothes feel.
- If your thoughts wander, be curious. See where they lead.
- What was the highlight of your walk today?

3. SAVOR A SCENT

Is there a fragrance that appeals to you? It could be a cup of tea, an herb or spice, a favorite soap, or a scented candle. Inhale the fragrance slowly and deeply. Note its qualities. Is it sweet, spicy, or strong; citrusy, coppery, or earthy; fruity, floral, or refreshing? Why does this scent appeal to you? Does it remind you of a person, place, or special memory?

4. HUM A TUNE

Humming engages our brains in pattern recognition, memory retrieval, and motor skills, which can interrupt anxiety and shift our focus. It also slows our heart rate, improves blood flow to the brain, and enhances our creativity.

5. CURIOUS CATEGORIES

Choose a category, such as birds, musical instruments, or ice cream flavors. List as many things from the category as you can.

6. ANCHORING STATEMENTS

Start with something like, "I'm [full name]. I'm [x] years old. I live in [city], [state]. Today is [day of the week], [month and date]. It's [time of day]. I am [sitting, standing, or lying down] [at home, at the doctor, in the hospital]. Outside, it's [sunny, raining, snowing, or foggy]. I am [hungry, thirsty, tired, bored, irritated, or lonely].

Continuing adding details until you feel calm.

7. STEP OUTSIDE

God's world was created for us. Our heart rate slows and our thoughts calm when we step onto a nature trail, walk through a garden, or watch a goldfinch eat thistle seeds.

A few minutes ago, every tree was excited, bowing to the roaring storm, waving, swirling, tossing their branches in glorious enthusiasm like worship. But though to the outer ear these trees are now silent, their songs never cease. Every hidden cell is throbbing with music and life, every fiber thrilling like harp strings, while incense is overflowing from the balsam bells and leaves. No wonder the hills and groves were God's first temples ... the God of the mountains will never fail us. (Naturalist, John Muir)

Anxiety often feels as if we are *bowing to the roaring storm, waving, swirling, and tossing*, but God doesn't leave us there. He quiets us with His love (Zephaniah 3:17) even as our cells are *throbbing with music and life*. God is with us in every unexpected circumstance, every difficult situation, and through every anxious thought. The *God of the mountains will never fail us.*