

## Using the Scriptures to Cope With Anxiety



"JEHOVAH is finding pleasure in those fearing him," wrote the psalmist. Indeed, the Creator rejoices in observing each of his human servants as they strive to uphold his righteous standards. God blesses his loyal ones, encourages them, and comforts them in times of despair. He knows that his worshipers are imperfect, so he is realistic in what he expects of them.—Psalm 147:11.

We may have no difficulty believing that Jehovah has great love for his servants in general. However, some seem to be so overly concerned about their own shortcomings that they are convinced that Jehovah could never love them. "I am too imperfect for Jehovah to love me," they may conclude. Of course, we all have negative feelings from time to time. But some seem to wage a constant battle against feelings of worthlessness.

### Feelings of Dejection

In Bible times a number of faithful individuals suffered from feelings of severe dejection. Job hated life and felt that God had abandoned him. Hannah, who became the mother of Samuel, was at one time deeply distressed about her childlessness and wept bitterly. David was "bowed low to an extreme degree," and Epaphroditus was distressed because news of his sickness grieved his brothers.—Psalm 38:6; 1 Samuel 1:7, 10; Job 29:2, 4, 5; Philippians 2:25, 26.

What about Christians today? Perhaps illness, advancing age, or other personal circumstances prevent some from doing as much as they would like in sacred service. This may lead them to conclude that they are failing Jehovah and their fellow believers.

Or some may constantly blame themselves for past mistakes, doubting that Jehovah has forgiven them. Perhaps others coming from difficult family backgrounds are convinced that they are just not worth loving. How is this possible?

Some grow up in families where the predominant spirit is not one of love but of selfishness, sarcasm, and fear. They may never get to know a father who deeply loves them, who looks for chances to praise and encourage, who overlooks misdemeanors and is prepared to forgive even more serious mistakes, and whose warmth makes the whole family feel secure. Since they never had a loving earthly father, they may find it hard to understand what it means to have a loving heavenly Father.

For example, Fritz writes: "My childhood and youth were strongly influenced by my father's unloving manner. He never gave any commendation, and I never felt close to him. In fact, most of the time, I was afraid of him." As a result, Fritz, who is now in his 50's, still has feelings of inadequacy. And Margarete explains: "My parents were cold and unloving. When I started to study the Bible, I had difficulty imagining what a loving father is like."

Such feelings, for whatever reason, can mean that our service to God is at times motivated, not primarily by love, but to a large extent by guilt or fear. Our best never seems good enough. The desire to please Jehovah and our fellow believers may make us feel that we are stretched beyond our limits. As a result, we may fall short of our goals, blame ourselves, and feel despondent.

What can be done? Perhaps we need to remind ourselves of how largehearted Jehovah is. Someone who understood this loving aspect of God's personality was the apostle John.

### **"God Is Greater Than Our Hearts"**

At the end of the first century C.E., John wrote to his fellow believers: "By this we shall know that we originate with the truth, and we shall assure our hearts before him as regards whatever our hearts may condemn us in, because God is greater than our hearts and knows all things." Why did John write these words?—1 John 3:19, 20.

John clearly knew that it was possible for a servant of Jehovah to feel condemned at heart. Perhaps John himself had experienced such feelings. As a young man with a fiery temperament, John was on occasion corrected by Jesus Christ for being too severe in dealing with others. In fact, Jesus gave John and his brother James "the surname Boanerges, which means Sons of Thunder."—Mark 3:17; Luke 9:49-56.

Over the next 60 years, John mellowed and became a balanced, loving, and merciful Christian. By the time he, as the last surviving apostle, penned his first inspired letter, he knew that Jehovah does not take each of his servants to task for every misdemeanor. Rather, he is a warm, largehearted, generous, and compassionate Father, who has deep love for all who love him and worship him in truth. John wrote: "God is love."—1 John 4:8.

## **Jehovah Rejoices Over Our Service to Him**

God knows our inborn weaknesses and shortcomings, and he takes these into account. "He himself well knows the formation of us, remembering that we are dust," wrote David. Jehovah realizes the impact our background has in making us what we are. In fact, he knows us far better than we know ourselves.—Psalm 103:14.

He knows that many of us would like to be different, but we are unable to overcome our imperfections. Our situation could be compared to that of the apostle Paul, who wrote: "The good that I wish I do not do, but the bad that I do not wish is what I practice." All of us are engaged in the same struggle. In some cases this may result in our having a self-condemning heart.—Romans 7:19.

Always remember this: More important than how we view ourselves is how Jehovah views us. Whenever he sees us trying to please him, he reacts not simply with mild satisfaction but with rejoicing. (Proverbs 27:11) Though what we achieve may seem to be relatively little in our own eyes, our willingness and good motive delight him. He looks beyond what we accomplish; he discerns what we want to do; he is aware of our wishes and desires. Jehovah can read our heart.—Jeremiah 12:3; 17:10.

For example, many of Jehovah's Witnesses are naturally timid and reserved people who prefer to keep a low profile. For such ones, preaching the good news from house to house can be a daunting challenge. Yet, moved by a desire to serve God and to help their neighbor, even timid ones learn to approach their neighbors and talk about the Bible. They may feel that they accomplish little, and this may rob them of their joy. Their heart might suggest that their public ministry is not worthwhile. But Jehovah surely rejoices over the great effort such ones put into their service. Moreover, they cannot be sure when and where the seeds of truth sown will sprout, grow, and bear fruit.—Ecclesiastes 11:6; Mark 12:41-44; 2 Corinthians 8:12.

Other Witnesses suffer prolonged ill health or are getting on in years. For them, attending meetings regularly at the Kingdom Hall can be fraught with pain and anxiety. Listening to a talk about the preaching work might remind them of what they used to do and what they still want to do, though infirmity holds them back. Such may have pangs of guilt because they are not able to follow the counsel as much as they would like to. Yet, Jehovah surely treasures their loyalty and endurance. As long as they remain loyal, he never forgets their faithful record.—Psalm 18:25; 37:28.

### **"Assure Our Hearts"**

By the time John reached old age, he must have understood much about God's largeheartedness. Remember that he wrote: "God is greater than our hearts and knows all things." Furthermore, John encouraged us to "assure our hearts." What did John mean by those words?

According to Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words, the Greek verb translated "assure" means "to apply persuasion, to prevail upon or win over, to persuade." In other words, to assure our heart, we need to win our heart over, to persuade it to believe that Jehovah loves us. How?

Fritz, mentioned earlier in this article, has served as an elder in one of the congregations of Jehovah's Witnesses for over 25 years and has found that personal study can reassure his heart of Jehovah's love. "I study the Bible and our publications regularly and carefully. This helps me not to dwell on the past but to keep a clear vision of our wonderful future. At times, my past catches up with me, and I feel that God could never love me. But, in general, I find that regular study strengthens my heart, increases my faith, and helps me to keep joyful and balanced."

True, Bible reading and meditation may not change our actual situation. Yet, it can change the way we view our situation. Taking thoughts from God's Word into our hearts helps us to think as he does. Moreover, study enables us to grow in understanding of God's largeheartedness. We can gradually come to accept that Jehovah does not blame us for our childhood environment, and he does not blame us for our infirmities. He knows that the burdens many of us carry—be they emotional or physical—are often not of our own making, and he lovingly takes this into account.

What about Margarete, who was mentioned earlier? When she got to know Jehovah, studying the Bible was of great benefit to her as well. She, like Fritz, had to revise her image of a father. Prayer helped Margarete to consolidate what she learned through study. "To begin with I regarded Jehovah as a close friend, since I had more experience with loving friends than with a loving father. Gradually, I learned to pour out my feelings, doubts, anxieties, and troubles to Jehovah. I repeatedly talked to him in prayer, at the same time piecing together all the new things I was learning about him, rather like a mosaic. After some time, my feelings for Jehovah developed to such an extent that I now rarely have trouble regarding him as my loving Father," says Margarete.

### **Release From All Anxiety**

As long as this wicked, old system lasts, no one can hope to be free of anxieties. For some Christians this means that feelings of anxiety or self-doubt might recur and cause distress. But we can be assured that Jehovah knows our good motive and the hard work we put into his service. He will never forget the love we show for his name.—Hebrews 6:10.

In the approaching new earth under the Messianic Kingdom, all faithful humans can expect to be released from the burdens of Satan's system. What a relief that will be! Then we will see even more evidence of how largehearted Jehovah is. Until that time, let all be assured that "God is greater than our hearts and knows all things."—1 John 3:20.