

# How I'm Surviving

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Â Since my first panic attack in 2002, I have been learning what it means to believe and rely oÃ-n my Redeemer, not oÃ-ne day at a time, but literally, moment by moment. For almost 3 years, fear was my constant companion. Like Job in the Bible, I had friends who tried to comfort me. They would remind me that fear is not from God. That perfect love casts out fear. I knew that, and I couldnâ€™t understand why I was having these panic attacks.

Â I was a Christian. I loved Jesus. I loved God. But from March 2002 to December 2004, I had over 60 panic attacks. I had to quit my job, give up singing in the choir, give up Sunday School and church. I became agoraphobic and couldnâ€™t leave my house for fear that Iâ€™d have a panic attack. I couldn't attend family and holiday celebrations. I couldn't tolerate anti-depressants and could oÃ-nly tolerate Xanax in small amounts, which put me to sleep throughout the day.

I struggled with depression for a year. I really identified with Jobâ€™s words in chapter 3, verses 25-26: â€œWhat I feared has come upon me; what I dreaded has happened to me. I have no peace, no quietness; I have no rest, but oÃ-nly turmoil.â€• All of my life, I had always been afraid of oÃ-ne thingâ€”that there was something wrong with me.

Some things had happened in my childhood that had convinced me at an early age that I was defective. That I didnâ€™t deserve anything good that happened to me. My husband, my children, my job. I didnâ€™t deserve any of Godâ€™s blessings, and I thought this lie was true because I wasnâ€™t coping very well. I tried to be a good wife, mother, daughter, sister, Christian, friendâ€”but I couldnâ€™t do it all. I couldnâ€™t juggle all of those balls. The harder I tried, the more balls I dropped, that oÃ-nly reinforced the fact that there must be something wrong with me. Everyone else was coping.

There must be some secret to life I didnâ€™t know about. My days became all about my stress and my failure. After 2 years of panic attacks, I was desperate, and I cried out to God to help me. I put 2 scriptures oÃ-n my bathroom mirror-- Philipians 4:6-7; and Isaiah 43:1. I asked to be put oÃ-n my church's prayer list. A few months later, a friend invited me to Beth Moore's Believing God Bible study at our church. It was very hard for me to walk into that room, and I sat trembling in silence, praying I wouldn't have an attack.

Somehow I managed to focus and listen, and I saw a ray of hope. For the next 9 weeks, I plunged into the Bible. I found out Who God was and what He could do and what I could ask. I discovered Jesus wanted me to abide in Him daily and that without Him I could do nothing. I found out I could have more of the Holy Spirit, just by asking. I found out how to really talk to God, and I found out how to listen. I learned to start my day in Bible study and prayer. After 3 weeks of Bible study, I returned to church. The next week I rejoined the choir.

The next Sunday I attended Sunday School and sang in the choir. After doing Beth Moore's Breaking Free Bible study oÃ-n my own, I began praying Godâ€™s Word over my panic attacks. I copied verses about fear oÃ-n 3x5 cards and read them over and over. Now, when I sense a panic attack coming, I grab those Scriptures and pray them and thank God that He hears me and has taken up my cause. I don't stop praying until the panic goes away. It always does, and in its place is peace. My panic is no longer severe (only a racing heart--my cue to get my cards) and never lasts as long.

God has so blessed me and loved oÃ-n me that I want everyone who suffers from panic attacks, anxiety, and depression to know about Him. My eyes have been opened to the truth about suffering. Sometimes we suffer so we can comfort others with the comfort we've received. And like Job, I am being restored. I began a part-time job last week.

My last panic attack was February 1, 2005. I've never gone this long without an attack. As Job said, "But those who suffer He delivers in their suffering; He speaks to them in their affliction. He is wooing you from the jaws of distress to a spacious place free from restriction". Job 36:15-16. I discovered my freedom in Christ Jesus.

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Tomorrow will be my 2-year anniversary at Panic Survivor. I can hardly believe that 2 years has gone by since I first posted HOW I'M BEATING PANIC AND ANXIETY. (I think that was the title.) A year before joining, I had embarked on a spiritual journey to know God and believe Him, and a year later, I had discovered how praying Scripture could stop my panic attacks and bring peace. I take no credit for my success. The Lord God did it all.

Tonight, I decided to write down in one place the steps I took toward recovery in hopes that it might help someone else onto the path of freedom from panic and anxiety. By following these steps, I experienced God in a way I had never known before. I felt His Presence, His pleasure, His peace, His joy, His love. He proved Himself to me so many times during my journey through depression, panic, agoraphobia, and social anxiety. He still proves Himself to me. Even though I no longer suffer with those 4 millstones around my neck, I still need my Lord every day. Because I didn't just fall into depression, panic, agoraphobia, and social anxiety. My flawed thinking was a major part of my problem. My response to stress, sickness, confrontations, situations, plus my self-absorption, selfish desires and selfish decisions all helped dig the pit I fell in. And it would be so easy to slip back into those ways again without my Rock. Â Step 1

**BELIEVE.** Believe God loves you and has not abandoned you. Believe He is for you and wants to help you overcome your anxiety and fears. Believe that He has plans for you. "Plans to prosper you and not to harm you. Plans to give you hope and a future." (Jeremiah 29:11) God wants us to believe Him. "You are my witnesses," declares the LORD, "servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am He." (Is. 43:10)Â

Step 2

**PRAY OUT LOUD.**

(a) Get alone with God and pray aloud. Repent of any unconfessed sin. You may be harboring unforgiveness against someone, or bitterness, or hatred. You may even be angry at God. Lay whatever it is at His feet. Ask Him to take it to remove it from you. This is not an easy step. For me, because of the abuse in my background, it was a difficult step, but it is a necessary one. Trust that He is a good and just God. Nothing is worth robbing you of the peace and love of God. Ask Him to help you let go of the past. If, like me, you removed God from first place in your life, ask Him to forgive you. Tell Him you want to love Him with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. Take yourself off the throne and let the Lord Jesus reign in your heart and in your life.

(b) Pray every morning. Make knowing Him and His will for your life your first priority. Ask Him to remind you to pray to Him throughout your day. Pray in humility and truth. Hide nothing from Him. He already knows your heart anyway. If it is impossible for you to pray out loud, then write your prayers in a journal. I go outside whenever I need to pray and my husband is home.

Step 3

**ASK.**

(a) Ask God for His help and guidance while you search for Him and His will for your life. Ask Him to give you more of what you lack—more faith, more belief, more trust. Give your panic disorder, depression, whatever has a stronghold on your life, to God. Lay it at His feet and ask Him to conquer it for you. I couldn't stop my panic attacks, but God could and

did by the power of His Word. Nothing is impossible for God. Nothing is too hard for Him. Come clean before Him whenever a situation or problem arises that threatens your peace. Ask Him to help you think as He thinks about the situation or problem. Counter every negative thought with God's Word. That's what having the mind of Christ means.

(b) Ask for the indwelling of the Holy Spirit every day. Ask God to fill you and thank Him for the filling. If you ask for the Holy Spirit, God will freely give it. We have His Word on it. "If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (Luke 11:13) The Holy Spirit will guide you and counsel you. (John 14:26) He will empower you and encourage you. He will put Bible verses in your mind when you need them. Through Him, God's Word will come alive as you read it, and you will gain spiritual understanding. (1 Corin. 2:14)

#### Step 4

**READ.** Read God's Word every single day. Believe what it says. God's Word will renew your mind. Soon positive thoughts will replace negative ones. Agree with God's Word as you read it. Talk to God about what you're reading. Buy an indepth Bible study or join a Bible study group. This will help you stay in the Word. Pray Scripture that deals with fear and anxiety every morning and every night. (I wrote verses on 3x5 cards and carried them with me whenever I had to leave the house. See Help, Inspiration forum, Bible Verses for Panic Survivors) Let God's words of peace replace anxious thoughts.

#### Step 5

**BE STILL.** Take time to sit before God in silence. Ask Him to search your heart and bring up any unconfessed or buried sin you may need to confess. Ask Him to mend the broken places in your heart while you wait in stillness. I've asked Him to erase all hurtful words in my memory and to replace them with His healing words. Ask Him to reveal Himself to you and let you know that you are His own. It may take some time to tame your thoughts and keep your mind clear while you sit before your Lord. But something that helped me was envisioning Him driving away anxious thoughts from my mind like He drove away the moneychangers from the temple. A lot of important lessons that God taught me were while I was on my knees before Him and listening.

#### Step 6

**PRAISE.** Praise God every day for what He is doing in your life. Praise Him throughout your day, as you go about your work. Work as if working for the Lord. Expect Him to show up somehow during your day. Sometimes it may be a coworker who stops in just to say how much they appreciate you. Sometimes someone may hug you and say, "I just love you," and then walk away, continuing what they were doing. (That happened to me twice!) I believe that God uses others to speak to us and encourage us. Try to think of problems you encounter as opportunities to walk by faith and put your trust in God. Pray about them and then let Him work things out for you. "The LORD will fight for you. You need only to be still." (Exodus 14:14)

#### Step 7

**SHARE.** As soon as you feel comfortable, get in Sunday School and church. Being with other believers refreshes our spirits. Ask your class or department to pray for you. Three years ago, I put myself on my church's email prayer list. Be sure and pray for others as well. Share with others about your journey as you feel led. Let them know what God is doing in your life. Encourage others on their walk.

Well, I believe that's it. I hope I haven't left anything out. As you can see, this journey is definitely not for the faint-hearted. But if you are like I was, desperate to be set free, having tried everything else and nothing worked, then you will find the hard work and effort of this journey will be well worth it! There are so many benefits of knowing and believing God. Not having panic attacks is just one of them. I am forever changed. I will never be the same. God has proved His love to me. I know He will do the same for anyone who desperately seeks Him. Â

