

# THE GOSPEL AND TEEN ANXIETY

Like a growing number of teens her age, 16-year-old Regan struggles with anxiety. When her youth pastor asked her to describe what her experience with anxiety feels like, Regan wrote a poem which paints a picture of how the perfect storm of the pressures of teenage life have created for her an existence filled with stress that never seems to let up. She opens and closes her poem with this sentence: "It's all just chaos." Sandwiched in-between she describes her experience of anxiety with a variety of words, including "continuous", "boundless", "binding", "crushing", and "pressure." She pleads, "I need a way off, a clearing in the brush, a voice in the rush."

Regan wrote her poem a couple of years prior to the start of the recent pandemic. At the time, it was recognized that anxiety was the number one healthcare issue facing children and teens. Now that our kids have experienced life in the midst of a pandemic, a host of studies say that anxiety has increased markedly among children and teens.

As parents, you've had a front row seat to these realities. One recent study found that 36% of parents of teenage girls and 19% of parents of teenage boys saw either a new or worsening existing anxiety problem in their kids due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

There are a multiplicity of factors that have contributed to adolescence shifting from "the wonder years" to "the worry years." The perfect storm includes what young people see as no escape from things like academic pressures, financial uncertainty, curating one's social media identity, family breakdown, international conflict, and illness/death. . . among a multitude of other realities.

While addressing adolescent anxiety is a complex task, there are some basic steps Christian parents can and must take to help their children and teens navigate life in healthy ways that bring honor and glory to God. Here are four initial steps that you can begin to enlist right away.

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## YOUTH CULTURE

## HOT QUOTE

**Post Malone.** Superstar rapper, singer and songwriter; when asked what he's most excited about for the future.

*"Kicking it, nothing to do ... I've made music for years and years, and down the line, I just want to relax and enjoy the simple things. Be like a kid again. Have no responsibilities and everything is handled: your kids, your family, everybody is set and doesn't need to worry, so you can just play games and play in the tall grass."*

Billboard  
January 26, 2022



**"IF YOUR CHILD'S ANXIETY ISSUES ARE INCREASING, BECOMING DEBILITATING, OR NOT GETTING RESOLVED, SEEK THE HELP OF A QUALIFIED CHRISTIAN COUNSELOR."**



**First, realize that anxiety is fundamental to our human existence.**

Because we live as sinful and broken people in a world undone by sin, we all experience anxiety. The Greek word for anxiety is translated "to be in pieces." It shouldn't be at all surprising that living in a world that's not the way it was created to be would leave us feeling, from time to time, overwhelmed with a sense that things are bad and that they are going to get worse.

**Second, realize that Jesus understands that we struggle with anxiety.**

All of us, including our kids, need to grasp the fact that Jesus would not have spoken so much about anxiety and how to handle it if it wasn't a universal human condition. Think about the fact that six times in The Sermon On The Mount, Jesus says, "Do not worry." Or what about the fact that the most-repeated command in the Bible – 365 times! – is some form of "Do not worry", "Do not fear", or "Do not be anxious."

**Third, teach your kids to address their anxiety with the truth of God's Word.**

The reality is that our anxiety is sometimes the very tool God uses to take us out of dependence on ourselves in order to draw us into trust and reliance on Him. Jesus took all of our fears and worries to the Cross. It is there that He conquered sin, death, and anxiety. Christ

took our anxiety to the cross so that He, in turn, could give us His joy and peace. Jesus invites us to come to Him for rest (Matthew 11:28-30). He reminds us that our anxieties don't add a single hour to our lives, but rather undo us (Luke 12:25). We are also told to "cast all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7). We can never preach these truths to ourselves or our kids too many times!

**Finally, don't be afraid to reach out for help.**

If your child's anxiety issues are increasing, becoming debilitating, or not getting resolved, seek the help of a qualified Christian counselor who has experience with helping kids and their families through the reality of anxiety in ways that lean into God, the Good News about Jesus Christ, and His promises. Anxiety is a very real thing. The path may be difficult, complex, and long, but each step is an important step to take.

Regan's desire for "a way off, a clearing in the brush", and "a voice in the rush" all speak to the fact that she is looking for God. Christian counselor David Powlison has said that kids like Regan "have good reasons to be afraid!" After all, the world is broken and crying out for redemption (Romans 8). But, as Powlison says, we all "have better reasons for trusting God."

**WALT MUELLER**  
CPYU President



## FROM THE NEWS

### "PERFORMATIVE"

In his play "As You Like It", William Shakespeare has his character Jacques utter these now-famous words: "All the world's a stage, and all men and women are merely players."

If those words were true when first written way back in 1599, they are even more true today. Thanks to social media and smartphone technology, all of us, if we desire, can stand on stage twenty-four seven for all the world to see. And stand on stage we do, regardless of our age. That's why the folks at Merriam-Webster added the word "performative" to the dictionary last year. The word refers to an action that's done purely to make a positive impression on others. The practice has oftentimes been called "virtue signaling." Our kids are especially susceptible to this practice as engaging in online performative behavior on the social causes of the day can gain them likes and followers. Teach your kids humility. Let them know that Jesus calls us to not even let our left hand know what our right hand is doing.

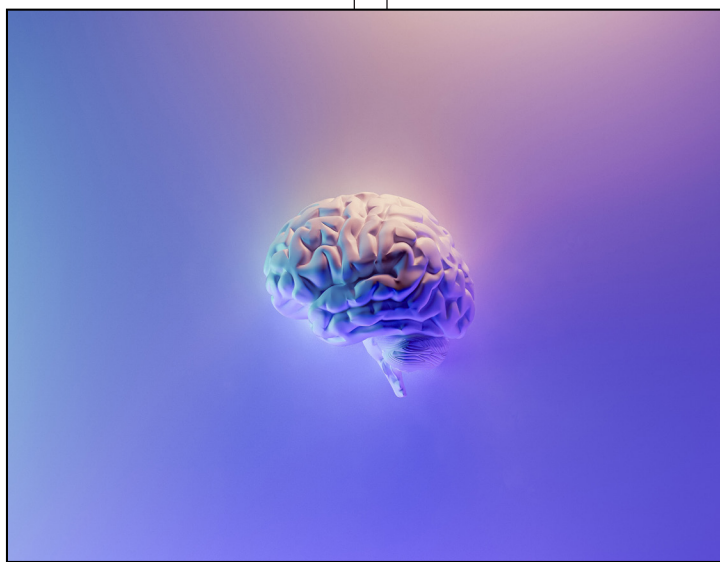


## TRENDS:



## Safetyism

It's very easy to get swept up into the spirit of the times. Because we live in the midst of culture, we can easily live into the values of that culture without taking the time to consider whether those values are good values, or bad values. One aspect of the spirit of our current times is what has been called "safetyism." The term was first coined by writers Jonathan Haidt and Greg Lukianoff in their book, *The Coddling of the American Mind*. They use the term to describe a belief system in which safety has become a sacred value. We tend to avoid any risk or danger, whether emotional or physical. Safety is a good thing, but when we shield our kids from any kind of difficult circumstance, we undermine their ability to develop the kind of positive resiliency that grows through experiencing healthy stress. Parents, let's help our kids become strong by allowing them to experience the kind of physical, emotional, and spiritual challenges that allow them to flourish now and into adulthood.



## LATEST RESEARCH:

## Sleep and Brain Development

New research from the Boston Children's Hospital analyzed the sleeping patterns of nine to eleven year old children in an effort to see the effect of inadequate sleep on brain development. This period of life, known as early adolescence, is a critical time in a child's brain development. The researchers looked at sleep duration, the time it typically takes a child to fall asleep, how

often a child wakes up from sleep, difficulty falling back to sleep, breathing difficulty, snoring, nightmares, and more. The research found that kids who have a shorter sleep duration, a more difficult time falling asleep, frequent waking, and sleep-disordered breathing had brain networks that were less efficient, flexible, and resilient. As parents entrusted by God with the stewardship of our children's growth and development, we need to be

sure our kids are getting the proper amount of sleep. Monitor your child's sleep, and if there are difficulties, seek medical help. God has made us to require the gift of rest.



## QUICKSTATS



A child's odds of developing Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy (CTE) double with every additional three years they play tackle football. *(Concussion Legacy Foundation)*

It is estimated that by 2030, "sharenting" - the practice of parents posting images and information about their children online - will play a role in two-thirds of identity fraud cases facing the young generation. *(Barclays)*



TOP

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## MOVIES AT BOX OFFICE

1. Uncharted
2. Jackass Forever
3. Spider-Man: No Way Home
4. Death on the Nile
5. Dog
6. Marry Me
7. Moonfall
8. Scream
9. Sing 2
10. Blacklight

*Cumulative Domestic Box Office  
for the month of February 2022  
Source: Box Office Mojo*



## PARENTS NEED TO SAY “NO”

by WALT MUELLER

Why do so many parents tiptoe gingerly around their children in today's world? More and more parents are afraid to step up, take the reins, and assume their God-given position of authority. Instead, parents have become like butlers, available to wait on and serve their kids' every desire and whim. Fearing rejection, we sometimes go against our better judgment and God's design to say yes when we should be saying no.

God established the family with a pecking order. Those who are older and wiser are charged with the duty of raising, nurturing, and protecting those who are young and not-so-wise.

In other words, parents are to parent their children. Dad, mom: you have a God-given responsibility to love your teenager, to guide them through life, to protect them from harm, and to provide for their well-being. This means that there are times when you will have to teach your kids God's will and way by saying no. Parent your teenagers to the glory of God!

# FROM THE WORD



David was no stranger to anxiety and fear. The book of Psalms, from start to finish, is filled with emotionally-charged expressions of lament which poured out of his difficult mix of life circumstances. Some of his difficulties had their source in conflicts that came from outside forces. Others were rooted in his own poor priorities and sinful behavior. David is just like us.

Typically, the Psalms move from anxiety and fear, to God-centered hope as David would remind himself of God's character, promises, and protection. In Psalm 56, David tells us that he feels constantly trampled, oppressed, and attacked. While his enemies may be different from those we face in today's world, the result of their onslaught echoes with our contemporary experience of fear and anxiety.

**"When I am afraid,  
I put my trust in  
you."**

**Psalm 56:3**

But we can't stop there. Like David, we must constantly be preaching the truths of God's Word to ourselves. When we do, God blesses us with the resolve of David: "When I am afraid, I put my trust in you" (Psalm 56:3). The sufferings, difficulties, and pressures of life lose their perspective when they are not viewed through the lens of eternity, God's character, and God's love. While difficulties are still difficult, they are not our demise. Praise be to God that with David we can say, "I shall not be afraid. What can flesh do to me?"

Parents, lose yourself in the Psalms. And, teach your kids to do the same.

## PODCAST



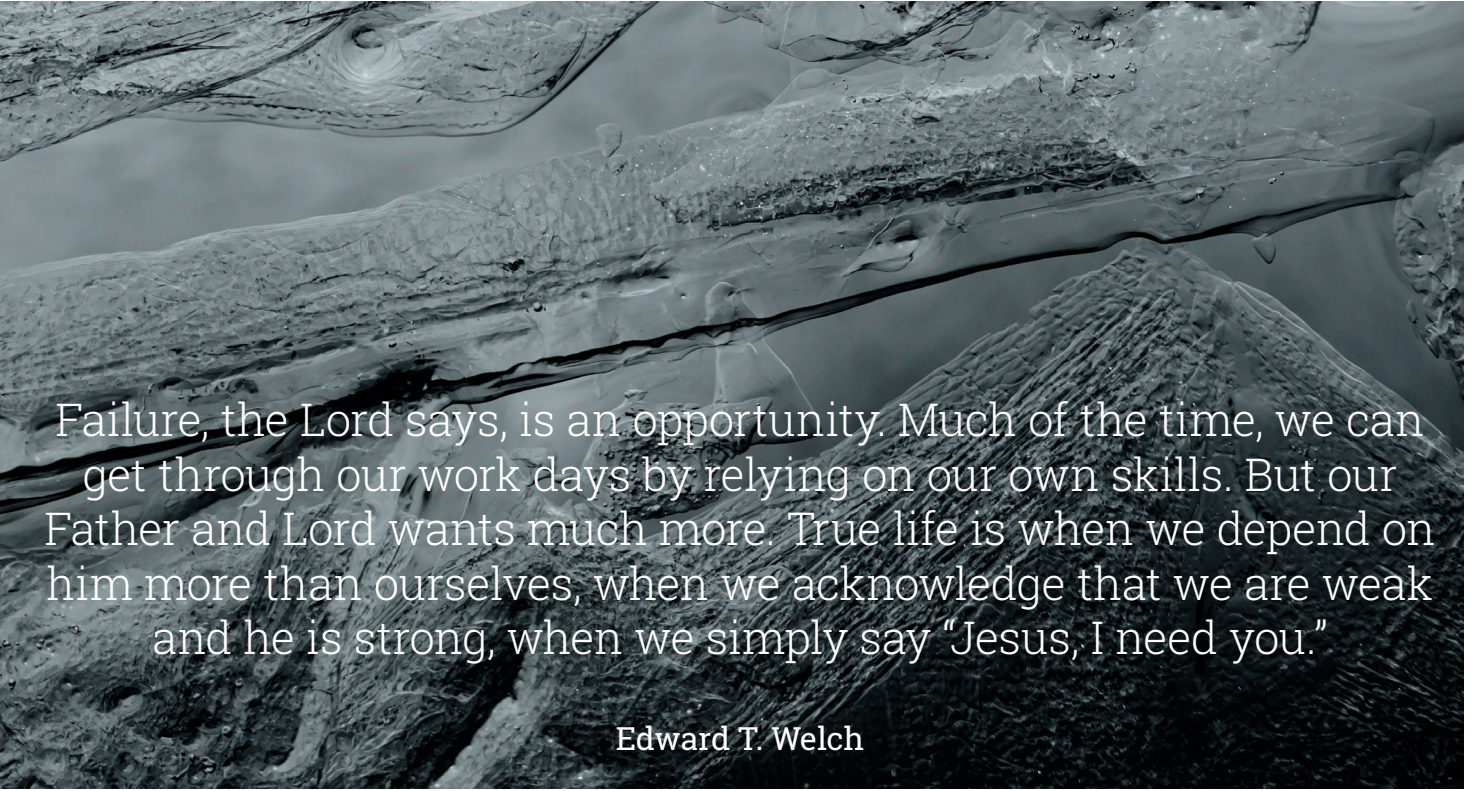
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is a one-minute daily radio show and podcast from CPYU.*

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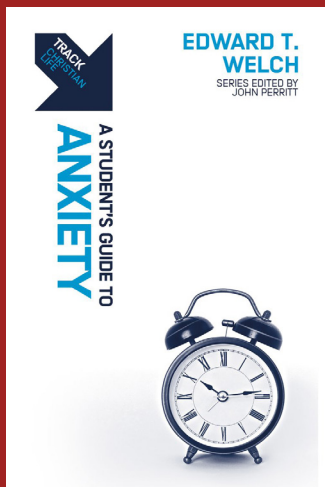




Failure, the Lord says, is an opportunity. Much of the time, we can get through our work days by relying on our own skills. But our Father and Lord wants much more. True life is when we depend on him more than ourselves, when we acknowledge that we are weak and he is strong, when we simply say "Jesus, I need you."

Edward T. Welch

# HELPFUL RESOURCES



BOOK

We all know the feeling. That nervous, jittery, tense feeling that tells you that something bad is just ahead. Anxiety can be overwhelming. But the Bible has plenty to say to people who are anxious. This book will help us to take our eyes off our circumstances and fix them on God.

In *A Student's Guide to Anxiety*, Edward T. Welch, Counselor & Faculty at the Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation, provides big biblical solutions that get to the heart of the matter and that last. Students will have their lives transformed by the truths in these pages. We encourage you to put this short book directly into the hands of students.

*A Student's Guide to Anxiety* is part of the TRACK series from Reformed Youth Ministries. TRACK is a series of books designed to disciple the next generation in the areas of culture, doctrine, & the Christian life. While the topics addressed aren't always that simple, they are communicated in a manner that is.