

The Anxious Thoughts Guide

A step-by-step guide for when you're feeling
overwhelmed, afraid and anxious



WHATEVER IS TRUE,
WHATEVER IS HONORABLE,
WHATEVER IS JUST,
WHATEVER IS PURE,
WHATEVER IS LOVELY,
WHATEVER IS COMMENDABLE,
IF THERE IS ANY EXCELLENCE,
IF THERE IS ANYTHING WORTHY OF PRAISE,
THINK ABOUT SUCH THINGS.

(PHILIPPIANS 4:8, ESV)





I have a choice.

My chest was tight, and I couldn't breathe. It was a Sunday night before a busy week, and I was excited about everything ahead of me. Why couldn't I catch a breath? It was as if my body was yelling "Something is wrong!" and my mind was racing to figure out what it was. With my arms wrapped around my middle, I sat still and prayed. Sure enough, as I started digging into the crevices of recent patterns of thinking, I noticed something. A subtle lie had begun to overshadow them all.

The spiral I had slipped into was this: What if I fail? What if I am not enough for this work? If it had been a conscious thought, I would have fought it and chosen the truth: God chooses the least qualified so He gets the glory. I don't have to measure up. But I hadn't even noticed what was happening until the lie pulled me into a spiral and my body revealed the anxiety that had set me spinning. How many of us are dragging through our days, weighed down by anxiety? Many of us find our thoughts circling around problematic circumstances or people. For others of us, anxiety has become the soundtrack of our days; we hardly notice it playing in the background of every scene.

(Please know that I'm talking here about thought patterns, not about anxiety that is rooted in our bodies' chemistry. Medicine and counseling are helpful tools that can help get our heads above water in order to process the root of our anxiety.)

The enemy has ensnared us with two little words: "What if?" With those two little words, he sets our imaginations whirling, spinning tales of the doom that lurks ahead.

Anxiety says, "What if?" "What if I get too close to this person and she manipulates me like the last friend I trusted?" "What if my spouse cheats on me?" "What if my children die tragically?" "What if my boss decides I'm expendable?"

Certainly there are healthy levels of anxiety that signal our brains to be afraid of things that are truly worth being afraid of — like oncoming traffic when we cross a street. The type of anxiety that sends our thoughts spiraling is when our emotional reaction to scary things goes beyond rational to illogical because our brains' fear networks are in overdrive.

We keep finding new concerns to worry about, as if by constant stewing we can prepare ourselves for what's to come. We forget that there is a God who will give us what we need today, next week and 20 years from now, even if our worst nightmares come true. But there is a better way because we have a choice. God's promises give us hope in every circumstance. He will resolve (in the end) every problem we may face here on earth.

Paul wrote in confidence of this truth, and then he gave us guidance for ridding ourselves of anxious thoughts:



“...do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.” (Philippians 4:6-8, ESV)

For just a moment, let's zero in on one of these replacement thoughts: “Whatever is true... think about such things.” What gets most of us in trouble is how we worry about things that may never happen.

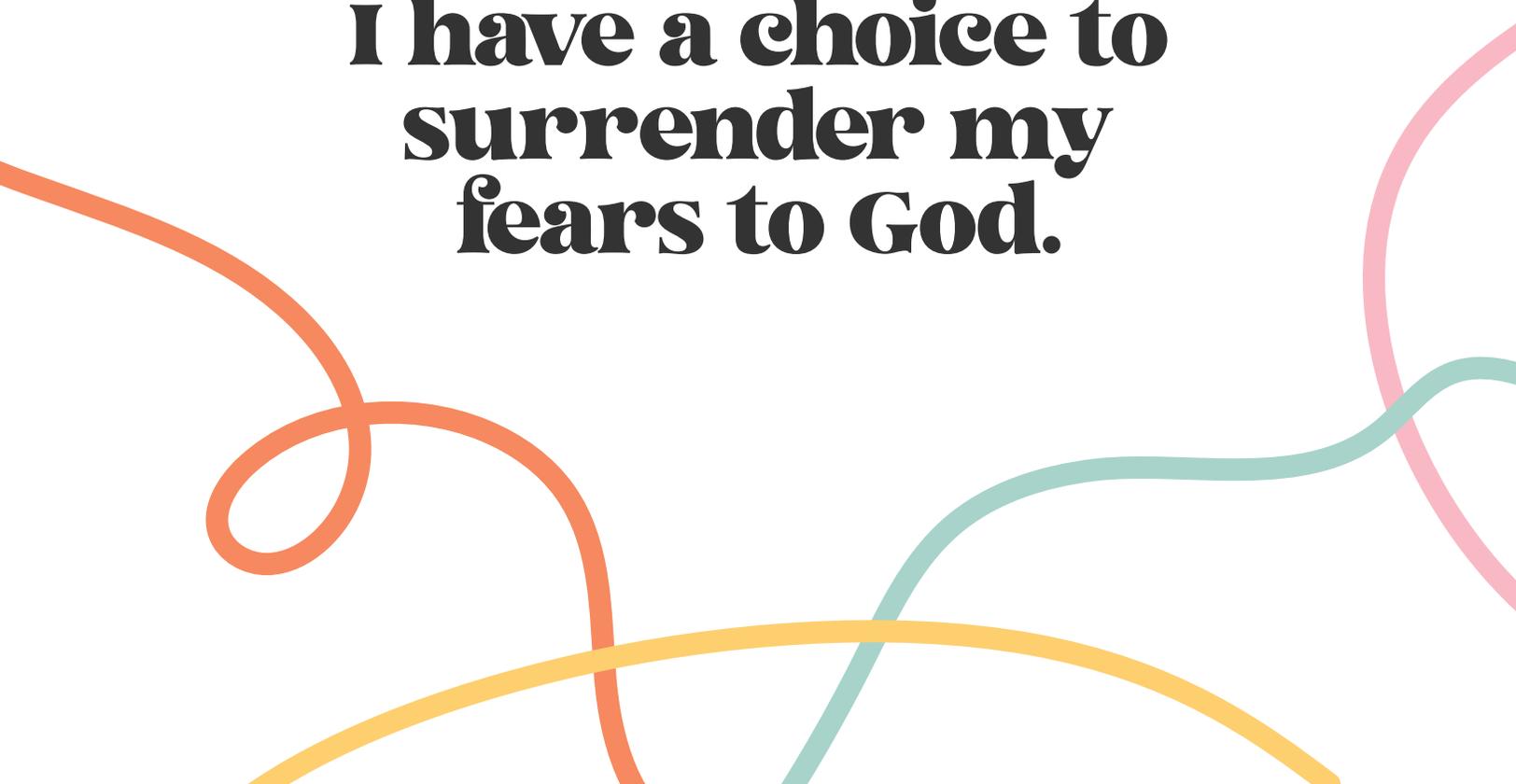
Truth is the most powerful weapon we have against the enemy, who is “*a liar and the father of lies.*” (John 8:44c, ESV). So we fight the enemy

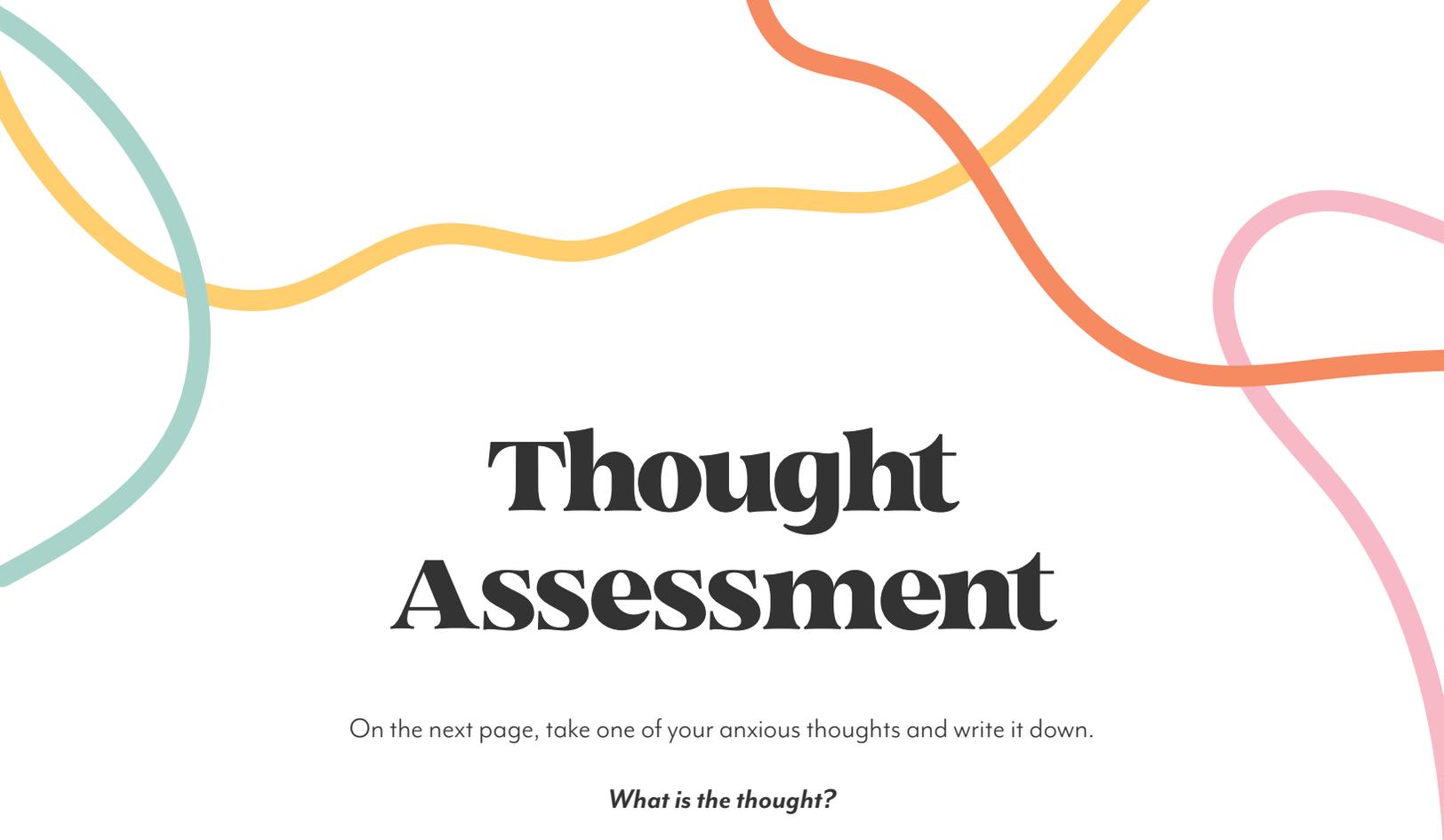
with whatever is true — meaning, whatever is real!

When we allow our thoughts to spin out of control with worry and fear, either consciously or unconsciously we try to elbow our way into the all-knowing role that only God can play. We forget that it's actually good news that He is in control and we are not.

Now, change is difficult and may come slowly. But because we have been made new creations, we have the Spirit's power to make the choice for truth. Changing our minds is possible! We pull the thoughts out of our heads, and we steal all their power and then replace them with what is true! There are no promises that our worst fears won't come true. Sometimes they do, but even then God remains our unfailing hope and He has given us a way out of our spiraling anxiety.

**I have a choice to
surrender my
fears to God.**





Thought Assessment

On the next page, take one of your anxious thoughts and write it down.

What is the thought?

Now diagnose the thought. ***Is it true?***

Take it one step further and consider, ***What does God say about this thought?***
You do that with Scripture; you do that with trusted people in your community.

Then you have to make a choice: ***Will you believe God or believe the lie?***

Ready?

Thought Assessment

GRAB THE THOUGHT

What is it?

DIAGNOSE THE THOUGHT

Is it true?

TAKE IT TO GOD

What does God say about it?

MAKE A CHOICE

Am I going to believe God?