

## Praise for *Struck Down but Not Destroyed*

“I’ve known Pierce Hibbs and his work for some years and have greatly appreciated his theological analysis and understanding of human problems. His *Struck Down but Not Destroyed* has been helpful to me. I have had similar problems (though I’d describe them as agoraphobia or introversion rather than anxiety disorder), and I’m grateful to be able to read Pierce’s testimony of how Jesus is sufficient to meet such needs. He is right to argue from Scripture that such difficulties can be means of spiritual growth and blessing, as he leads us to respond to them in a godly way. I hope this book gets wide distribution.”

– **John M. Frame**, author of *Systematic Theology* and the Theology of Lordship series

“It’s no secret that most of us live anxious lives in varying degrees. Most people learn how to tolerate this subtle anguish and agitation with less than effective (and godly) coping skills. In other instances, however, anxiety punctuated by panic attacks overwhelms and takes on a life of its own. Pierce Taylor Hibbs brings his life as a person who knows the crippling power of this type of anguish in full view, then takes the reader on the less often walked path that challenges the reader to let God be in charge of their anxiety as he has learned over the years. This approach does not follow the traditional therapeutic model that automatically assumes that the goal of God’s work in us is his method of symptom reduction or deliverance. Similar to the anguish Paul describes when discussing his brand of torment, Hibbs points believers in the direction that Paul exclaims as the better path- the powerful presence of Jesus in the midst of anxiety’s fire. For a counselor the highest recommendation of a book is buying copies to give to a client. I will be buying this book.”

– **Jeffrey S. Black**, Professor & Chair, Department of Counseling & Psychology, Cairn University

“It is one of the remarkable oddities of our age that we live at a time where we often enjoy more material comfort and security than ever before and yet where there is also much evidence to indicate that anxiety is a crushing problem for many as never before. In this accessible, personal, and helpful book, Pierce Hibbs uses his own struggles in this area and the teaching of the Bible to offer comfort and advice to those who face their own anxiety problem. An unusually helpful volume.”

– **Carl R. Trueman**, author of *Grace Alone* and *Luther on the Christian Life*

“This is the book I have been waiting for to share with loved ones who suffer with anxiety disorders. *Struck Down but Not Destroyed* is the best I’ve read on the topic so far, taking a holistic approach that will minister to body, mind, and soul, offering personal testimony, digestible and helpful theology, practical follow-up actions, and beautiful prayers. Anxiety can be incredibly scary and paralyzing. Pierce helps sufferers to know what to do with that fear, truly accomplishing his subtitle to faithfully live with anxiety.”

– **Aimee Byrd**, author of *No Little Women* and *Why Can’t We Be Friends?*

“I have read scores of books about anxiety. None comes close to this thorough, biblical and most practical study. Most of us, if we are honest, will admit to being captured by worry somewhere in our lives. This book is as good or better than dozens of therapy sessions. I was particularly helped by the emphasis on prayer: most needful, most difficult. And God’s grace is woven into the warp and woof. Everyone needs to read it.”

– **William Edgar**, author of *Reasons of the Heart* and *Created and Creating*

“Pierce Taylor Hibbs has given the church a gift with this insightful and compassionate book on anxiety. Placing his own struggle with anxiety in the light, he invites the reader to do the same and to experience the liberty that accompanies such honesty. Hibbs carefully grounds our thinking and experiences in Scripture and offers a wealth of practical counsel. This is a book to read and then read again. I will be commending this wonderful book to all of my fellow strugglers.”

– **Todd Pruitt**, Lead Pastor of Covenant Presbyterian Church in Harrisonburg,  
VA

“Anxiety often shows up unannounced at the door of the soul, lingering beyond the bounds of our abilities. Through experience and prayer, Pierce Taylor Hibbs describes the battle of living faithfully with this “long-term guest.” Rooted firmly in Scripture, this work is filled with theology that is accessible, practical, and personal—with the gospel woven throughout its pages. Hibbs writes with heart, soul, and most of all, biblical truth. Whether you are worried, weary, or whittled down, Hibbs shows how God stewards your anxiety in order to conform you to Christ for His glory and your good.”

– **Nathaniel Schill**, Administrator, Book Store Director, and Elder at Calvary  
Chapel Quakertown

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## Other Books by the Author

- *The Trinity, Language, and Human Behavior: A Reformed Exposition of the Language Theory of Kenneth L. Pike*
- *In Divine Company: Growing Closer to the God Who Speaks*
- *Theological English: An Advanced ESL Text for Students of Theology*
- *Finding God in the Ordinary*
- *The Speaking Trinity & His Worded World: Why Language Is at the Center of Everything*

To receive free downloads and connect with the author, visit [piercetaylorhibbs.com](http://piercetaylorhibbs.com).

## Connect and Learn More!

Want access to more resources for dealing with your anxiety? Check out the reader resource page for this book. Go to <http://piercetaylorhibbs.com/struck-down-but-not-destroyed/>. Then join the Facebook group “Christians Battling Anxiety” to engage in more discussions and immerse yourself in a prayerful community. You can also follow the author on Twitter (@HibbsPierce), Instagram (@pthibbs), and Facebook (@wordsfromPTH).



**STRUCK DOWN BUT NOT DESTROYED**

*Living Faithfully with Anxiety*

by

**PIERCE TAYLOR HIBBS**

**STRUCK DOWN BUT NOT DESTROYED**

Living Faithfully with Anxiety

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*For Christina. Thank you for kneeling beside me when I'm struck down.*



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# Introduction

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If you're holding this book right now, I'm assuming you're clawing your way through hell, or you have in the past, or you know someone who is. I don't know *where* you are—buried under blankets in a dark room, sitting on a bus with your body stiff as steel, gripping a steering wheel like your life depended on it—but I don't judge. I've been in the worst of places with my anxiety. I also don't know *how* you are—whether this is a “good” day or a “bad” day, whether your anxiety seems distant like a memory or coiled around your neck like seventy-pound boa constrictor—but I promise I have something you need to hear in this book. When it's all boiled down, the message is plain and simple: your anxiety is *not* accidental. It's doing something in you; it's *working*. And once you find out how, you'll never see it the same way again.

There are scads of books out there on anxiety and panic—some by doctors, some by psychologists, some by counselors, and a whole slew of them by overly excited lay people who believe they've found the golden ticket to paradise. I've read many of them. And for me all of them have the same basic flaw: they assume that anxiety is first and foremost something to be gotten rid of.

I don't see it that way. I'm convinced that Scripture teaches something quite different. For starters, note that the world says certain things when it hears trigger words. The world hears “problem,” and it says, “solution.” The world hears “disease,” and it says, “cure.” The world hears “pain,” and it says, “relief.” That sounds well and good, but remember this: when the world heard “Christ,” it said, “crucify.” The voice of the world is not your true North. In fact, the world is confused about the most elementary truths of Christianity. Our faith is foolish to their eyes and ears (1 Cor. 1:18). Why would the world be right when it comes to your anxiety? As a follower of Christ, your ear should be bent toward the good book. That's what I'm aiming to do in these pages. And the good book reveals that the triune God can use anxiety—even an anxiety disorder—to shape your soul in ways you never thought possible, as long as you're committed to speaking with him and hearing him speak back to you in his word.

So, here's my promise: if you listen to the voice of Scripture amidst your anxiety, God will change you in ways you couldn't even dream of; he'll build the muscle of your soul, increase your mustard-seed faith, and give you compassion that runs deeper than the Atlantic. That's a big promise, I know. But I'm making it because I've

seen it come true in my own life and in the lives of others.

I've gone from lying in the fetal position, convinced I couldn't leave my room without dying to taking a train into Philadelphia by myself for jury duty. I've gone from being paralyzed by fear because of a thirty-minute commute to watching God work through my nerves in a six-hour traffic jam. I've gone from refusing to attend events with large groups of people to praying intensely for those surrounding me in public places. Don't get me wrong—I still struggle. Many things still draw out my anxiety, but I've seen God do so much through it that I can say without hesitation: "God, I'm okay if you keep using this." With God at the helm of our ship, it always finds its true North, because it always finds *him*, no matter what anxious gale whips through our sails.

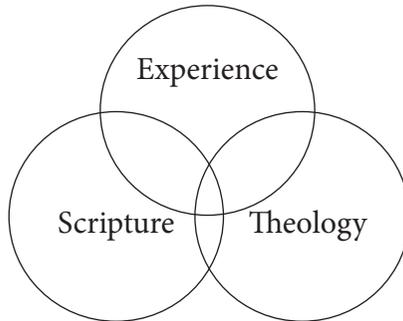
As you're clawing your way through hell (or coming alongside of someone who is) and looking for hope and healing around every corner, I'm asking you to stop and listen—*really* listen—to these words: "You're going to be okay because of Christ." I say that not because your anxiety is going to dissolve as you delve into these pages, or because I think that, logically, your anxiety has to go away at some point, or because I've found the optimal blend of antidepressants and self-help methods. I say that because you're going to be conformed to the image of Christ through your anxiety, and that's ultimately what it means to be "okay." To be okay is not to be free *from* all pain and suffering; it's to be free *in* all pain and suffering because you're indwelt by Christ. In fact, you're indwelt by the Father, Son, and Spirit (John 14:23; Rom. 8:11). God, my dear reader, lives in you and is going to use your anxiety to do great things—not good things, *great* things. Don't ever loosen your grip on those words. Clench them with white-knuckled fists. In the torrents and hurricanes, in the swells and the storms, hold fast.

Now, these great things I'm talking about are going to emerge from a one-syllable word: *trust*. The popular self-help books use words like "defeat," "overcome," "cure," and "conquer"—but my approach is different. So, to start, I'm going to ask you to trust *me*. I've been battling an anxiety disorder for over twelve years now. I've been through counseling. I've consulted with doctors for years about balancing medications. I've been thirty pounds lighter in two weeks because I couldn't eat. I've been reclusive and withdrawn. I've crawled through the caverns of hell more than once. But I've also come out the other side and done some things I thought were impossible with my anxiety. And God has shaped and pressed himself into me in ways that now seem impossible apart from it. If I can do anything that we could call "great" in the Christian sense, it's because of that little word: *trust*—trust that I wasn't going to end the day with my throat closing up or strapped to a hospital bed, trust that my extreme discomfort and frustration were purposeful, trust that there is a spiritual war going on for my soul, and I know who wins. There is nothing so powerful as God-given trust, for it frames our perception of what's happening and

gives us a course to follow.

In the pages ahead, I'm going to walk you through what God has been teaching me about anxiety, and I'm going to reinforce a message that may sound counterintuitive in our world: *anxiety is a spiritual tool in the hands of a mighty God*. In that sense, it's not something to flee from; it's something to be learned from, something to use in order to draw nearer to God. I want you to work with me on changing your perception of anxiety so that you can open yourself to God's sovereign use of it in your life. I can promise you that by the end you won't view the absence of anxiety as supremely important. Instead, your focus will fall on the status of your soul before an all-powerful, soft-voiced shepherd, leading you moment by moment, calling you to trust, pulling your neck gently with his shepherd's crook, bringing you back into the fold, fixing your ears on his voice.

Now, here's how I've organized the book. Because I believe that we need a context to interpret anything in life, I'll be giving you pieces of our biblical or theological context in each chapter. We'll explore who God is, who we are, and what the world is like. I've tried to make these contexts bite-sized chunks. I'll also add my experience and the biblical counsel God has been applying to that experience. So, in each chapter you'll be able to see the following elements overlapping.



I also walk progressively from darkness to light, from intense and acute periods of anxiety to less intense periods. This reflects my own experience, but since anxiety comes in waves, you should be able to benefit from earlier parts of the book as well as the later parts, depending on which period you find yourself in right now.

Lastly, you'll see that each chapter ends with reflection questions and a prayer. There are also special "Reader Resources" at the end of most chapters. That's because I don't want you to just read this book; I want you to *use* it. I want you to take it with you into your daily routine and put it to work.

I encourage you to answer the questions in a group setting, to pray the prayers, and perhaps to even write some of your own prayers in light of what you're learning. Writing out prayers helps us articulate what we feel, what's beneath our

feelings, and what we're asking for from the God who gives the greatest gifts.

If you're blessed by this book in any way, then I ask of you one thing as a writer: tell someone about it and leave a review on Amazon. These little things go a long way in spreading the word about a biblical message that other souls need to hear.

Now, brace yourself. We're about to enter the dark country of anxiety. We'll have a light that can't go out (Scripture), but the darkness is real and unsettling. Let's step slowly.

## CHAPTER 1

# We Are Crushed To Be Called

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KEY IDEA: God may crush us in order to call us.



I have heard it said that when God wants to do something impossible, he takes an impossible man and crushes him. In other words, God crushes those whom he calls. He breaks the ones he beckons. The Apostle Paul is a perfect example. With his vision, zeal, and bravado, Paul could do nothing for the kingdom of God. He could only cause harm (Acts 8:11–3). But once he was blinded and brought low (Acts 9:3–9), once he learned how to be led around by someone else’s hand, *then* he could do “all things” (Phil. 4:13). The impossible is made possible through crushing.

As I write this, I serve at a seminary where I teach international students what we call “theological English.”<sup>1</sup> I also work with native-English speaking students, guiding them in how to write various types of theology. My passion and calling, however, is to write theology myself.<sup>2</sup> In 2006, if you would’ve told me that *this* would be my occupation and passion, I would’ve said, “Impossible.” I had no interest in attending seminary and learning theology. I loved to write, but I didn’t know where my place would be in the writing world. That was before God crushed me. So much for impossibilities.

Let me start where my life took a darker turn. My father battled a brain tumor for about twelve years, and I was naive about what that really meant until the age of seventeen. That’s when I began to digest the fact that his death would come early, that it was a miracle he hadn’t died already. After his third and final major brain

surgery, the cancer took the reins of life and steered him away into silence. Due to the pressure the tumor was putting on his brain stem, he'd lost his ability to speak. Quiet and subdued, he came home on hospice care like a bird with broken wings. He spent the final three weeks of his life on a railed bed, getting all of his nutrients from a little plastic tube. He was slowly detaching from the world of the living. His flights were finished.

His final night came on June 3rd, 2004. I was eighteen and had just finished my first year of college. That night, his respiratory system moaned to a halt for two hours. Then the hospice nurse told us he had about three breaths left. (I've never counted to three like that since.) With the final breath, there came a noticeable absence of *him* from the room. There had been nine of us just a moment before. Now there was eight.

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*“To be crushed is to be reduced, to be emptied of all the false hopes of self-sufficiency.”*

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There aren't many words I've found since then to describe what I went through on that night and for the months that followed. But I think *crushed* is the best one—not destroyed, but *crushed*. There's a great difference between the two. To be destroyed is to be dissolved without hope of recovery or resolution. To be destroyed is to be no more. But to be crushed is to be reduced, to be emptied of all the false hopes of self-sufficiency. To be crushed is to realize that you're thoroughly *dependent*.

But my crushing went to new depths about two years after his death. I was back at college, waiting on the curb outside one of the dormitories for my girlfriend at the time, Christina, who is now my wife (another impossibility made possible). I remember the comfortable evening air hanging over the campus. As I took in the smell of fresh-cut grass and a hint of smoke from a nearby cigarette, a wave of heat crept down from my head and rushed through my back and legs. My breath grew shallow; my throat closed up, and I couldn't swallow.

As she walked towards me, I struggled to stand up in a world that now felt like a great spinning ball. “Um, I'm having a panic attack.” I didn't even know what that meant; I just knew I needed help—fast. I begged her to drive me to the hospital, thinking there would be some consolation in that, but every step I took towards the car added tension in my chest and shoulders. Within a matter of seconds, the whole world looked black and foreign and terrifying. I knew it as soon as we started driving: I was going to die, right here in this car on the way to a hospital in Hershey, Pennsylvania. This was it.

I'd love to tell you that I met that moment with resolve, but that would be

a lie. I wasn't brave. I was paralyzed with panic. Something very bad seemed to grip my whole mind and body and *squeeze*. The next twenty minutes were hell on wheels. A few miles into the car ride I started yelling and calling out for help, moaning and gasping for air. An eighteen-wheeler churned down the dark country road ahead of us.

"Can you go around him!?"

"It's a double line!"

Christina was crying, but I couldn't think about calming down for her sake. Panic makes you blind and deaf to anything except your own preservation. With the little air I had in my lungs, I yelled, "Please, just GO AROUND HIM!" She pushed the pedal to the floor, both of us hoping that no one was around the bend in the opposite lane.

I took out my phone and dialed 911. I'll never forget that conversation with the operator.

"911. What's your emergency?"

"Yea, I'm having a panic attack, and I can't breathe."

"Okay, sir. Can you tell me where you are?"

"I'm in the car, on my way to the hospital . . . in Hershey."

"So, you're already on your way to the hospital?"

"Yes."

"Alright, well we can't do anything if you're already driving to the hospital."

My heart dropped. I paused for a long second. I was dying. This was really it. I gave up all reservations. No pride. No pretending to be okay. Complete vulnerability.

"Okay, well, can you at least pray for me?!"

"Sir, if you're already on your way to the hospital, there's nothing I can do from here."

"But can you *pray* for me?!"

CLICK.

She hung up the phone on a "dying" twenty-year-old!

That was the first time in my life I really asked for prayer. It wasn't the sort of asking that I'd done before: the kind where you don't really care that much if the person prays or not. It wasn't prayer as a formality. This was real, earnest pleading. It was lifeline begging. It was all I had: a voice and a question. And even in that moment of raw panic, I was thrown by someone's *refusal* to pray. Maybe she didn't believe in prayer, or in God. Maybe she was just embarrassed or indecisive. I'll never know. But it brought my crushing that night to a new low.

A few minutes later, I was thanking God out loud for getting us to the hospital safely. "It's okay," I said with shivering vocal chords as we hobbled across the parking lot under the fluorescent lights. "It's okay—people are praying for me."

Christina nodded sympathetically—she must have been just as amazed as I was that we were still alive after that nightmarish drive.

I checked into the hospital and sat on a bed in the hallway for about an hour, sipping ice water and breathing with ten cinderblocks on my chest. My friends came to make sure I was alright. Doctors told me that I had a reaction to a type of Tylenol cold medicine and that my symptoms would disappear over the next few hours. I was relieved, even though I still felt the same way: like an alien in my own skin, struggling to perform the basic bodily functions of breathing and speaking.

But the symptoms didn't go away. Back at my dormitory, I wandered up and down the hallway all through the night. I couldn't keep my shoulders down; they crunched whenever I squeezed them (one of the body's ways of reacting to stress). My throat felt like a pinhole. Just a few hours before, I was carefree and casual. I was a stone comfortably set in my routines, happy to find solace and solidity each day. I was stable. But now . . . I wasn't a stone. I'd been pressed too thin. I was a piece of paper ready to blow away in the wind. I was *so* fragile. I was so . . . *crushed*.

The next morning, I walked around the campus, trying to shake off the feelings. But they wouldn't leave. So, I went to the nurse's office. What should've taken thirty seconds to explain took ten minutes. I had to take deep breaths in between sentences just to tell her what had happened the night before. She handed me a brown paper bag. "Breathe into this," she said. "You're really fighting? Do you want me to call an ambulance to take you back to the hospital?" I nodded my head and took another deep, brown bag breath. My chest ached from heaving. "Yea . . ." Another brown bag breath. "Yea . . . I think so."

A few minutes later I took my first ambulance ride. Laying on a gurney, holding an oxygen mask to my face while two teenagers wearing EMS shirts made awkward conversation—not exactly the stuff of Hollywood. They called my mom and Christina, who met me at the hospital. The doctors drew blood and ran tests, but they didn't find anything. "There's nothing wrong with you physically," said one of the doctors. "You're free to go." Free to go? *Free* to go? My own skin was a prison. I was an alien among humans. I could blow away any second: I wasn't *free* to go anywhere.

I never seek out controversy, but I looked straight into his eyes and said, "I'm not leaving here until you give me something." He came back a few minutes later holding a pill bottle filled with Ativan—a drug that essentially slows down your brain. Clutching the pill case in my hand, I walked out of the hospital feeling delirious, confused, and frustrated. But more than anything, I felt helpless and low. I felt *crushed*. Everything in the world was the same, but I was drastically different. I was now a foreigner in the familiar.

I decided to go home to rest and figure out what was happening to me. For the next few weeks, I felt like fractured glass, ready to shatter at the softest touch.

*Everything* required effort, even eating. I lost 30 lbs. in about two weeks. It was difficult enough to breathe and swallow, let alone eat. I was also extremely sensitive and hyper-vigilant. I've since heard others who struggle with anxiety disorders say that they “couldn't feel comfortable in their own skin.” That's a good way of putting it. It's like being scared by someone who jumps out from behind a door, but then that mix of horror and surprise never really goes away. It just lives in your blood.

My mind flapped wildly in the wind of the ordinary. All of the normalcy and automaticity of routine had vanished. I was too aware of myself, looking at my fingers as I ate and my feet as I walked. Every few seconds I would feel the backs and edges of my teeth with my tongue. I tried not to look at myself in the mirror. It felt too bizarre.

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*“My mind flapped wildly in the wind of the ordinary.”*

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I couldn't find peace. I couldn't find stillness. I couldn't find rest. I couldn't find contentment or joy or even distraction. All I could do was feel terrible and terrified *for no reason*. That was the most disturbing part.

After several days, I remember saying to myself, “Nobody can live like this. I'm not even a real person.” This was my rock bottom: weak, joyless, hopeless, and spread thin. I couldn't function. I even shut out Christina, the most important person in the world to me. I shut her out not because I wanted to or even because I chose to; I simply couldn't process anything outside of myself. I was paralyzed by panic and hyper-vigilance. What was happening to me? And why?

I had no answers. But I learned one thing very, very quickly. My reader, please hear this: *when you hit rock bottom, your ears and eyes begin opening*. You hear and see more than you ever have before: too much. I imagine this sort of thing happened to the Apostle Paul. It's hard to describe—sort of like a lifting fog that once protected you, that once kept you from being overwhelmed by your surroundings. Fear and panic rush in like open air and light. They surround you. And even though you have to shield your eyes with your hands just to walk around, you start getting used to it. The loudness of all the sounds and the sharpness of the light become more familiar.

Time churned painfully forward like an old rusted train, but as the gears grinded and clicked, as I dealt with the shock and isolation of anxiety, I started to see and hear *more* of the world around me—more than I ever had before. The landscape began to clear. Shapes appeared . . . and the sound of birds. And in this clearing landscape, my ears and eyes were on high alert for signs of help and hope. I didn't hear and see much, which was disconcerting, but I was still listening and looking. I was

so desperate that I turned to an old hope long neglected: the voice of God. Could God—who had really only ever been a sweet-sounding *idea* in my childhood—be real? Could he help? My crushing turned me toward him.

I had no pride or illusions of independence at this point, so I rummaged around for my father's old Bible and found it on my brother's bookshelf: tattered leather edges and well-worn pages—fields where fingers had lived. The black leather cover was soft and flimsy from use. I opened to Genesis and began reading. And I didn't stop.

I can't say why, exactly. It wasn't as if I could hear an audible voice telling me that everything would be okay, that one day I wouldn't feel like my own skin was a prison, or that I could have peace if I only believed—none of that. I just had a sense that this was the only way out, if there *was* a way out. That sense kept me focused on every creased, highlighted, pen-marked line of prose in that little black Bible. It never left my sight or side, and seldom left my hands.

I might not have heard the voice of God yet (in the way I wanted to), but I was listening more intently than I ever had before. Everything else—places, food, people—became quiet, as if the volume were turned down on life—and yet the base of Scripture kept thudding. In between waking and sleeping, that Bible might as well have been sewed to my palms. I was always clinging to it, staring at my strange fingertips running over the tiny letters. My life was becoming linear. My days were oriented around sequences of sentences, chapters, and books. The printed page gave crystal clear directions to my crushed soul: move from left to right, top to bottom. Then turn the page and repeat. My mind did not flap as wildly in the wind when I was reading those words.

The mental anguish I experienced for those first weeks and months was enough to halt everything else: relationships, aspirations, passions. Things became very simple: survive. Breathe, and bring that little black Bible with you everywhere. These are the goals of someone who's been crushed.

## **We Are Crushed To Be Called**

I didn't know it then, but my crushing was the beginning of my calling. I may not have been hearing an audible voice from God, but I was *reading* his voice in Scripture. I was listening. I was learning and moving in a direction marked only by words. I was being called. And if I hadn't been crushed, I wouldn't have followed. I wouldn't have started chasing after a divine voice etched onto the pages of my father's Bible. I was crushed, in other words, so that I could hear the call and start walking down a different path. I had no idea where that path was leading, but I knew *who* was leading me. And I knew I would follow this path and no other.

My point in this first chapter is a simple one: God has a purpose for allowing us to be crushed by anxiety, and that purpose is helping us to hear his call.

It's nothing novel, really. I didn't understand back then, but now I know that God is constantly calling us to himself. He's *always* asking us to be part of his kingdom (Matt. 6:33), to put that kingdom first and follow the voice of the Good Shepherd (John 10:11). But we don't hear the call. We're lost in distant pastures. And in our lostness, rather than seeking the soft voice of a sovereign shepherd, we deafen ourselves in a thousand ways with a million distractions. We fill our ear canals with noises. God is always calling; we're just not listening.

My reader, we are crushed so that we can *listen*. We are crushed to be called; we are brought low so that we can hear the high things of God.

But why? Why is this the way it has to be? That's where the theology comes into play.

## Theology: What You Need To Know Right Now

I told you in the introduction that each chapter will have a bit of theology for you: bite-sized chunks that you need to store in your mind's pocket as we keep walking together through these pages. Here's the first bit: in order to understand your being crushed and the purpose it serves, you have to know who God is and who you are.

Let's start with the greatest question we could ever ask: Who is God? You have to know the answer to this question if you want to understand your anxiety and the role it's playing in your life. Why is God allowing you to be crushed by anxiety? The short answer: because he wants to communicate with you. He's calling you. That makes perfect sense if you know who God is. God is what we would call a *communicative Spirit*. He is a being who speaks with himself in three persons (Father, Son, and Spirit) and speaks to his creation by way of revelation—in the world around you (Ps. 19:1–4; Rom. 1:20) and in Scripture. Why is that so critical? Well, if you want to have a relationship with this God, if you want to understand why and how he is using your anxiety, then you have to communicate with him. You have to listen (hearing his call) and speak. Language (speech), in other words, is at the core of who God is, and it's how we come to know him.<sup>3</sup>

Second, let's ask the follow-up question: Who are *you*? That question has an answer that parallels that of the former question because we're made in God's image. The simple answer to the question of who we are is “creatures made for communion.” But we need to spell out what that means.

If language (speech) is central to who God is, it's also central to who we are. When God made us, he created us in his image (Gen. 1:27). But what does that mean? I love the definition for image-bearers that Geerhardus Vos (1862–1949) gives, and I'll be repeating it throughout the book: “That man bears God's image means much more than that he is spirit and possesses understanding, will, etc. It means above all

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<sup>3</sup> See *The Speaking Trinity & His Worded World: Why Language Is at the Center of Everything* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2018).

that he is disposed for communion with God, that all the capacities of his soul can act in a way that corresponds to their destiny only if they rest in God.”<sup>4</sup> “Disposed for communion”—we are creatures made for interpersonal communion with the Trinity: that’s what it means to be made in God’s image. With everything in us, we long for communion with the Father, Son, and Spirit. We need it. We’re not whole without it. The yearning for communion with God is buried in our blood. It’s what makes us human.

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*“The yearning for communion with God is buried in our blood. It’s what makes us human.”*

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Okay—that’s enough theology for now. We’ll draw these things out in more detail later. Remember to keep these truths with you as we move ahead: God is a communicative Spirit, and we were made to commune with him.<sup>5</sup> These twin truths are going to have everything to do with how we see God using our anxiety to do great things.

Putting this theology in terms of what we’ve developed in this chapter, we might say that we’re crushed to be called because of *communion*. Communion with God is our lifeblood. It sets vigor in our veins. It gives us purpose, meaning, and consolation. We can’t do without it. Why might God be crushing us with anxiety? He’s calling us to communion. Anxiety will help you drop any illusions that fulness of life resides anywhere except in the God who communes with himself (John 10:10), the God who has called *you* into communion with him. We are crushed to be called for communion.

## Reflection Questions and Prayer

1. When did you first encounter anxiety in your own life? How did it crush you?
2. How is being crushed both a good and a bad thing?
3. Discuss with someone else the effects of being crushed. What happened to you as a result of being crushed?
4. I said that I felt anxious and hyper-vigilant *for no reason*. How does our reasoning play a role in our anxiety? (We’ll discuss this in a later chapter.) What

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<sup>4</sup> Geerhardus Vos, *Anthropology*, vol. 2 of *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. and trans. Richard B. Gaffin Jr. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2014), 13.

<sup>5</sup> I develop my view of language as *communion behavior* in *The Speaking Trinity & His Worded World: Why Language Is at the Center of Everything* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2018). You can also reference “Closing the Gaps: Perichoresis and the Nature of Language,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 78, no. 2 (Fall 2016): 299–322; and “Words for Communion,” *Modern Reformation* 25, no. 4 (August 2016): 5–8.

- sorts of reasons do you give for your anxiety? Are any of those reasons spiritual?
5. I defined God as a *communicative Spirit*. How does that definition help you relate to God? What things keep you from having a deeper relationship with him?
  6. As an image bearer, you are made for communion with God. What sorts of things interrupt or prevent your daily communion with him? Are there concrete steps you can take to address those issues tomorrow? There's no point in waiting!
  7. Discuss what implications there might be if you *don't* consistently commune with God through prayer, worship, and through the body of Christ. What happens when communion is absent? Draw on your own experiences.

### *Prayer*

God, I am crushed.  
I am low. I am listening.  
You make me breathe and think and talk.  
You uphold me at every moment.  
You are *all* to me.

Build me in my smallness. Please.  
Build me minute by minute, brick by brick,  
Into that temple of your Spirit.  
Oh my God, help my smallness  
To find strength in your greatness,  
One moment at a time.

And as my anxiety rushes towards me,  
Help me to prioritize communion with you,  
Through your word,  
Through prayer,  
Through your people.  
Make *communion* the keyword for my life.

## Reader Resource: Anxiety Self-Reflection

Making progress in your battle with anxiety has a lot to do with *self-awareness*.

Where are you with your anxiety? Take the following self-reflection seriously and be candid. You're the only one looking. Use the "Explanation" column to record the specifics of your experience: how exactly does your anxiety feel? When does it crop up? When does it go away? You can jot down words and phrases to help you remember particulars. I've answered the first question as an example.

Question	Yes/No/ Sometimes	Explanation
My anxiety often prevents me from doing things I'd like to do.	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>I've learned a lot over the last 12 years, but I still get freaked out by things like flying, traveling without my family, or speaking in public. I have ups and downs, but I haven't crashed in a while. I'm limited, but not paralyzed.</i>
My anxiety makes it difficult for me to perform basic daily functions.		
I have triggers for anxiety in certain situations.		
I have developed habits or tools that I use to deal with my anxiety.		
I feel that I'm understood by my family and friends when it comes to my anxiety.		
My goal is to eliminate my anxiety as soon as possible.		
I think a lot about why God might have put anxiety in my life.		
I agree that God sometimes crushes us to call us to himself.		