

Starving a Hungry Wolf

“Cast all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.”

1 Peter 5:7

Thankfully wolf attacks on humans are rare, yet it's still unsettling to hear piercing howls in the hills nearby from their predatory cousins, the coyotes. And though a real wolf has never stalked me, for years I felt prey to a kind of spiritual wolf in my struggles with anxiety. Whether fed by germ phobias, petrifying doubts, intrusive thoughts or a host of other worries, the insatiable hungry beast loomed over me all the time. Throughout much of my young life I lived this way, as if caged with a wild animal that I myself fed unwittingly with my imagination.

As a child I didn't understand that I suffered from an anxiety disorder but rather, felt guilty in light of my Christian upbringing. I went to church, but knew little about the truth that could set me free. Instead I thought something must be wrong with me to experience such inner turmoil. After all, practically everyone around me seemed so carefree in comparison. But striving to be good and trying hard not to fret, I failed miserably.

Moreover, I was desperate for spiritual help, but asking for it was too risky. It meant I'd have to open up to someone whom I feared would confirm my already full-blown self-condemnation. I didn't dare take that chance so I remained walled off like a cyst, only to face more attacks by the fangs of worry and guilt. And comfort from God seemed so far off, for certainly He most of all would condemn me for falling so short.

But His heavenly hounds came running. And I was shepherded onto the path of grace, where green pastures finally fed my spirit. How wrong I'd been, believing God to be mean and angry with me. Rather, He had patiently waited for me all along. My salvation was by grace through faith, and this gift was in no way through anything I did, but all through what He did for me (Ephesians 2:8-9).

When I realized that no strings were attached to His forgiveness, the burden of laboring to earn God's favor had lifted. All attempts to acquire a pure mind through my own efforts meant nothing; they were to Him as “unclean rags” (Isaiah 64:6), not to mention sinking sand as far as inner peace was concerned. Thus when I understood how dwarfed my weaknesses really were in the shadow of God's unfailing character, I finally knew there was no cause for anguish about my eternal future.

Yet though salvation for all eternity took but a moment of faith, walking by faith without compulsive anxieties took many moments of time. That nasty wolf didn't instantly vanish, but instead lay in wait, ready to pounce and feed upon some residual impulse from me. Old habits can die hard, and for a while the fleshly craving lingered, like a deep-seated itch, to drive away myself the long-standing doubts and cares. When I clung to this faithless mindset, the wolf rightly sensed its greater strength and so continued to stalk me.

Thankfully nothing, not I, not that wolf, nor anything else can overpower God. Even though I might stumble and fall, His Hands still held me (John 10:28) and ultimately freed me from the jaws of the beast. So in time I learned to cast these cares upon Him (1 Peter 5:7) and ceased waging the battle myself. At first, simply trusting God felt unnatural, as if all my control was gone, and release from the chains that bound me brought no small discomfort. But after faith became a routine practice, unprecedented peace came to my weary soul. Consequently the wolf, deprived from food, languished from starvation and left.

It's funny how some of life's momentous events can change us dramatically on the inside, but imperceptibly on the outside. I still looked the same, walked the same and talked the same. But my course had changed drastically, with no turning back. Nothing desirable lay behind me, only that mean old wolf trying to get fat again. But what would lie ahead? Just because one beast left doesn't mean another wouldn't come take its place. Indeed, with a void left by vanquished anxiety the question remained, what would I fill it with? If it's worry about other things such as work, health or safety, these are just, well, just other hungry wolves of a different color. In fact anything else, even a good thing idolized and exalted above God, is really only a wolf in sheep's clothing.

Therefore, I understood that the end of every search must be God; only He can fill the vacuum in the human soul, and only He is the unwavering compass to stay focused upon while dealing with all of life, including both good and bad. Yet I've seen how my struggle with anxiety serves as a type of painful souvenir; these memories remind me even today how much I need God to stay free. Otherwise, I risk falling prey to anxiety again, or taking some other unproductive detour from His road of purpose for my life.

My husband John knows about my past anxieties; moreover, he's supportive even though unreasonable anguish can still occasionally surface in weak moments. Even though God's Word is the sword of the Spirit I depend upon, human understanding and encouragement is nonetheless a great blessing. Such support doesn't encourage my weaknesses but rather, me. Help to see more clearly, truthful words spoken in love, these are what deliver balm to my soul when the nasty wolf comes sniffing around, trying to bite me.

How unfathomable are God's riches and His ways past finding out (Romans 11:33)! Though anxiety brought much distress when I couldn't fathom why, the great things God wrought from it surpassed all, both for His glory and my good.