

Anxiety–It’s Not Just Stress

Anxiety seems like it’s having a heyday. And it’s no wonder! In our world, perfection and performance are priorities, our viewpoints are polarized, relationships are stressed, and we’ve experienced collective trauma in the last few years. We may try to write off anxiety or fear as “just stress” or even see it as a lack of trust. Anxiety—especially if it leads to panic attacks—can even cause us shame as we think we should be able to just deal with it. Guess what: you’re not alone, this is valid, and your emotions are trying to tell you something. Our online writers below share their experiences and their wisdom: in acknowledging the truth of our experience, we’re able to open up to Jesus in new ways and allow Him to bring us hope, peace, and healing.



What I Wish I’d Known About Anxiety

Trevor Holder dives into what’s helped him engage with his own anxiety and to come alongside others who are having similar experiences.

Naming Our Fears, Reclaiming Our Hope

Where does that fear drive us? Does our fear and anxiety drive us to protect ourselves, or does it drive us to God, our Protector? Dave Hutchins shares from his own experience and what he’s learned from Dan Allender’s work about processing our fears and anxiety.



A New Song

Is anxiety a sin I need to repent of and “just stop”? Or is it a neurological, genetic condition, a result of the fall that I can’t help? Caitlin shares how focusing on her primary identity as God’s beloved—who happens to struggle with anxiety—frees her to be strong in the battle.

Upfront Issue over Anxiety from 2017

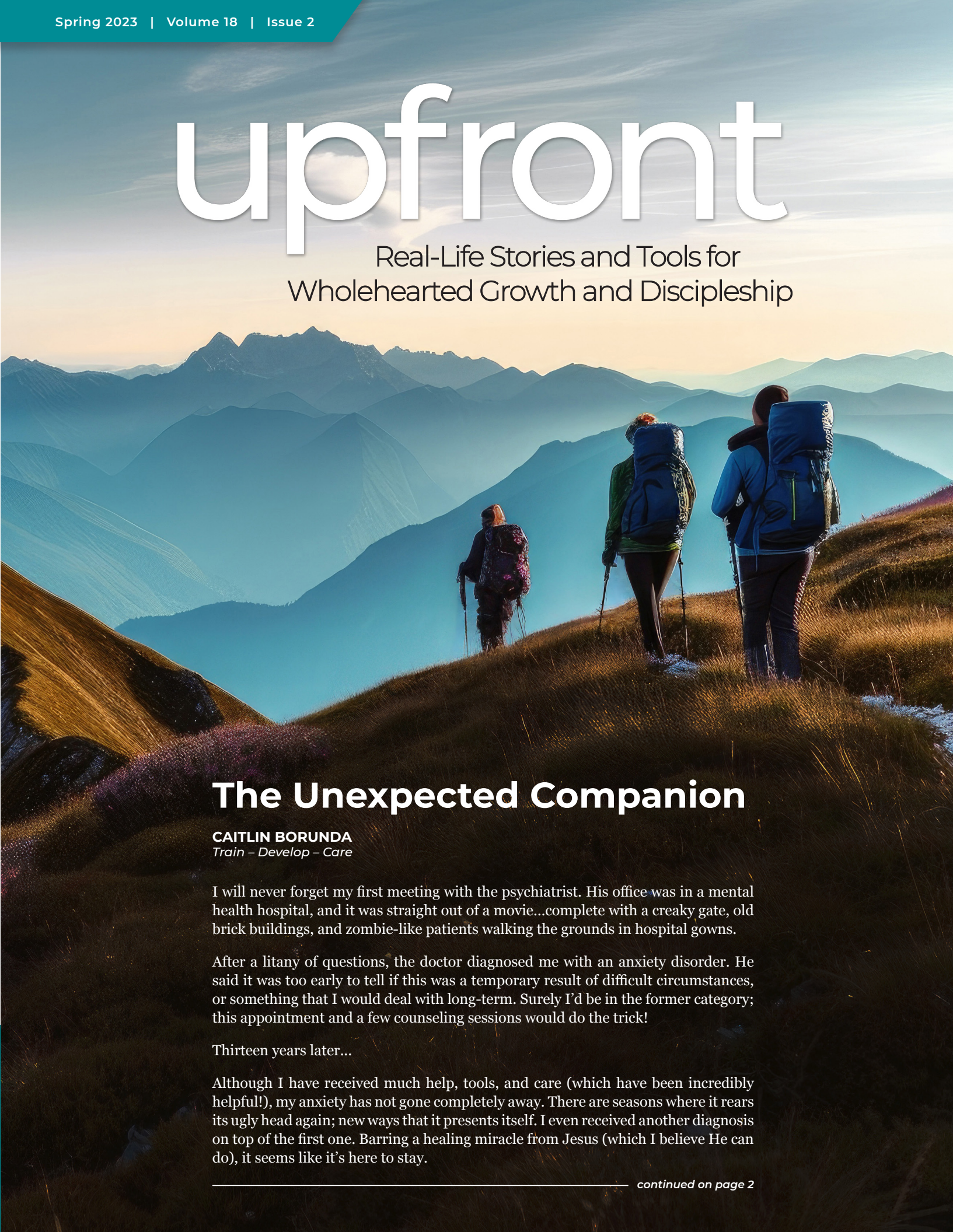
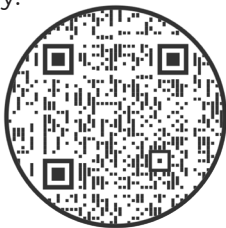
Check out this previous issue of Upfront addressing the topic of anxiety.



Overflow

As we pursue health and sustainable rhythms for our souls, we can’t say enough about the power of pausing to just be. It battles insecurities and anxieties, and builds a sweet space to interact with Jesus. Here are some spaces where we’re providing a pause for you.

- **Powerful Practices on The Ripple Effect podcast:** Navigator spiritual directors and soul care practitioners facilitate practices (examen, lectio divina, just stopping) in a miniature retreat that fits right into your day.
- **Text OVERFLOW to (719) 652-1955** for occasional text-message reminders to pause and links to resources that might help you abide in Christ more deeply.
- We’d love to bring a **soul care retreat** to you! If you’re Navigator staff, you can find out more about hosting or attending by scanning the QR code to the right or visit tdc.navigators.org/events/soul-care-retreats.



upfront

Real-Life Stories and Tools for
Wholehearted Growth and Discipleship

The Unexpected Companion

CAITLIN BORUNDA
Train – Develop – Care

I will never forget my first meeting with the psychiatrist. His office was in a mental health hospital, and it was straight out of a movie...complete with a creaky gate, old brick buildings, and zombie-like patients walking the grounds in hospital gowns.

After a litany of questions, the doctor diagnosed me with an anxiety disorder. He said it was too early to tell if this was a temporary result of difficult circumstances, or something that I would deal with long-term. Surely I’d be in the former category; this appointment and a few counseling sessions would do the trick!

Thirteen years later...

Although I have received much help, tools, and care (which have been incredibly helpful!), my anxiety has not gone completely away. There are seasons where it rears its ugly head again; new ways that it presents itself. I even received another diagnosis on top of the first one. Barring a healing miracle from Jesus (which I believe He can do), it seems like it’s here to stay.

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My favorite book is *Hind’s Feet on High Places*, a beautiful allegory of the spiritual life. It tells the story of Much Afraid, a disfigured young girl who journeys with The Shepherd to new heights of love and transformation. The Shepherd gives Much Afraid two unexpected companions to help her along her journey. Their names are Sorrow and Suffering. She must learn to take them by the hand and travel with them, and they ultimately get her to places she would never have gotten on her own.

My anxiety has been annoyingly disruptive at best and debilitating at worst. I spent years (and lots of energy) trying to get past it, to push it aside so I could “move on” with my life and important Navigator ministry. Over time, I’ve slowly learned to embrace my anxiety as a teacher and a guide, showing me new depths of God’s love and grace when I allow it to lead me to Him. It’s become my unexpected companion.

My journey with anxiety has also led to my most thrilling and fulfilling ministry. As a pastoral counselor with TDC, I have the privilege of journeying with men and women who wrestle deeply with anxiety and other mental health issues, serving as a guide in the wilderness. I’m continually blown away how God uses the comfort I’ve received from Him to

comfort others in their time of trouble (2 Cor. 1).

The apostle Paul knew this lesson intimately. Three times he asked the Lord to take away a mysterious “thorn” in his flesh, but God said no. *“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness”* (2 Cor. 12:9). Perhaps your thorn is also a mental health struggle, or another long-term battle. Instead of running away, may we have the grace and perseverance to walk with our teachers, the unexpected companions of sorrow and suffering, who, over time, usher us into the very presence of God. We may not be fully “healed” in this life, but we *“are being transformed into his likeness with every increasing glory”* (2 Cor. 3:17). ◀

Caitlin came to Christ through The Naves at Penn State. She is a pastoral care specialist with TDC’s care team. She also serves with her husband, Josh, in collegiate ministry in San Marcos, Texas. Her other passions include jazz dance, New York style pizza, and 90s alternative music.



Unflappable: Flying by Faith in the Face of Fear

DEB PROCTOR
Collegiate Leadership Team



“You’re so unflappable,” people tell me sometimes. And I laugh. Every time I choose to use my voice to say something that’s hard, I always have a level of anxiety internally before I say it. I don’t know if my anxiety will ever go away, but as a child and young adult, I allowed it to control everything I did or didn’t do—for instance, I didn’t drive until I was 20.

I was 19 and a new believer when I learned I could take steps of faith and still be afraid at the same time. I was asked to consider a summer missions opportunity as a freshman, going to camps to lead recreation and activities. “We really think you’d be good!” they said. “You’re not listening; I’m not doing that!” was my response. But I ended up saying yes after seeking the Lord.

As I led Bible study for these youth, the fear didn’t go away. For me, it was more about God saying, “You can do this because of me.” I learned I could keep going even though I was terrified of all the new things God invited me into that summer... and every day since then. When I joined Collegiate, I didn’t want to lead Nav Night. I never saw myself as a leader, and it felt too unnerving to use my voice. I am amazed at how God keeps taking me to new places despite my fear.

Nine years ago, when I went through a huge loss, my anxiety went off the chart. I found myself afraid to go to sleep. My counselor helped me realize how much anxiety I have lived with a lot of my life. It took me a long time to make peace with the fact that I needed medication in this season. But it did help. The meds didn’t remove my anxiety, but they allowed it not to be front and center. I found myself clinging to what God says about fear and anxiety. Over thirty times in the Bible, God promises to stay with us and never leave us. It helped to know that I wasn’t alone.

Anxiety isn’t the same for everyone. I’d love to tell people I don’t have anxiety anymore, and most people think I’m calm and confident... but internally, it’s always stirring, whether it’s a season when it’s calmer or a season when it’s beyond intense. But at every step, God will never leave me nor forsake me. I can trust him with my fear.

We have permission not to have it all together. You don’t have to pretend you’re not afraid. Be honest and authentic about what it is, not just with God but with close people in your life. It’s not just companionship; it’s also the confession bringing healing in community.

Fear doesn’t have the power. God has the power. ◀

RESOURCE: *Calm My Anxious Heart* by Linda Dillow

Anxiety: An Invitation to Slow Down

FRANCIS JULOYA
Train – Develop – Care



“Parang malalim yata ang iniisip mo?” (English: “Looks like you’re thinking about something deep.”)

As a child, my anxiety was perceived as deep thinking. When anxiety takes hold of me, it consumes my thoughts, and often blinds me to the promise of God’s tender and infinite care for me.

When I was an undergrad, I vividly remember walking to take an exam I was unprepared for. I could not control my body. I was sweating, trembling, hyperventilating, and experiencing chest pains. I was having an anxiety attack. As I sat in my chair, a friend saw me. “You look lost in your thoughts. Are you ready to take the exam?” As my friend waited for my response, my mind sped up, and I thought of a way to hide my anxiety: I had to lie. I was ashamed.

When battling anxiety, my mind and emotions go to multiple “what-if” scenarios, stealing the joy of the here and now. Anxiety is a thief, but I’m learning perhaps it can offer something else.

Matthew 6:26-28 says: *“Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?... And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin.”* (NIV, emphasis mine)

We often interpret these words as a reminder that if God cares for the birds and flowers, we know He cares for us. But as I continue to learn how to befriend my anxiety, I now see an additional truth. Anxiety is an invitation to slow down. In telling me to look at the birds and consider the lilies, I am asked to be present at the moment and truly consider God’s creation—I am asked to be still. The passage invites me to be grounded and mindful of my surroundings. Not surprisingly, grounding is a therapeutic technique for anxiety that re-establishes our sense of being in the here and now.

When I genuinely stop to look at the birds, I can see how they flap their wings. I notice the colors of their feathers as they gracefully glide through the air. I hear their melodic chirps. As I stop and consider the flowers, my eyes see their vibrant colors contrasting with their environment as bees and butterflies surround them. I can smell their beautiful aroma. Through the birds and the flowers, I am reminded of God’s care for me

If and when anxiety comes, I have grown to recognize it as an invitation to slow down and be with the Creator, considering the birds and the flowers. I hope to accept the invitation. ◀

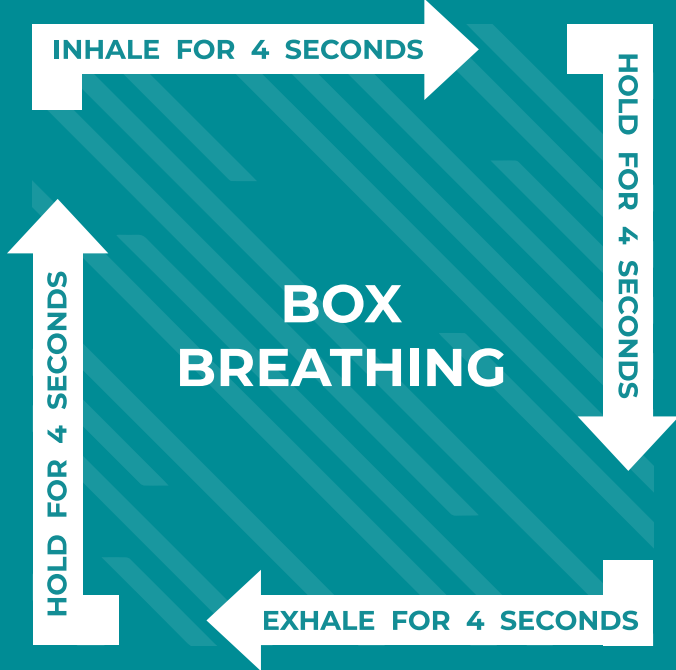
Box Breathing

Anxiety’s power comes from its ability to separate our minds, our emotions, and our physical, embodied experience. When we recognize that our thoughts and worries have taken over, racing ahead of reality and pulling us toward paralysis or panic, it can serve as a reminder that we need to exist in the now. Box breathing, a simple exercise, can help you recenter—whether you need to make peace with a racing heartbeat or just do a quick audit of your physical and emotional experience.

Try this: Find a comfortable position with your feet grounded on the floor.

1. Breathe in for four counts
2. Hold for four counts
3. Exhale for four counts
4. Hold for four counts

Repeat this several times, preferably until you feel more centered again. As you breathe, just focus on your breath, the rhythm, making it long, slow, and even.



If you notice your mind wandering, notice what you feel in your body. Can you sense the shift in your heart rate? Do you sense the security of the floor beneath your feet? Perhaps it might help to imagine Jesus is here with you—it’s true. He’s here, you’re loved, and you’re held.