

Panic Attacks

Dr Lois Dodds (Part 2 of 2)



I talked last time about what to do when you feel a panic attack, or perhaps a spiritual attack, or even an attack of guilt. If you live in a dangerous environment, especially a place where there's war or terrorism or a lot of crime, you may experience this kind of thing periodically. It's worse than just regular anxiety because you can really feel panic rise in your body - you can feel the physical symptoms of it. Maybe your hands get sweaty, you feel nauseated, your heart's beating fast, you get hot, you sweat, and you suddenly feel endangered. Here are some additional steps that you can take besides the ones we talked about last time.

If you can be with another person at that time, and trust them, tell the person that you need their attention or help for a few minutes. Or, if you'll do better alone, ask to be excused. Tell the person what you're experiencing and ask for their prayers. It might seem really embarrassing if this happens in a social gathering, or at a time you don't expect it, but if you can take a little break, explain what's happening, and ask for prayer, that can be very helpful. You might want to also step outside or to a safe place and collect yourself. Ask God to show you what's happening, tune in to your body. Practise those physical ways to calm yourself we talked about last time and then deliberately 'put on the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to stand.' Realise that this moment of confusion, or oppression, is not the way you usually live. It's a momentary thing and it will pass. Remind yourself that you are safe - especially if it seems like a spiritual attack - say the name of Jesus out loud; claim the victory that he bought for you over our enemy Satan, when Jesus died on the cross for you. The amazing thing to me is that even friends I've had in other countries who were not Christians have known the power and the reality of spiritual attacks. They've described things like, 'Something is crushing the life out of me, squeezing my chest,' and instinctively they've called out to God, even though they didn't really understand what was happening.

God has given you authority to reject and to refuse any lie and any power that is not from Him. Again, remember the scripture that says, 'God has not given me - or you - the spirit of fear', so if I'm experiencing fear, that's not from God. 'He's given me the power of love and a sound mind.' I'm not going crazy; this is how I feel right now, but I'm not going crazy - this is a temporary feeling. Call on the name of Jesus and ask Him to cast off any demonic power. Ask Him to put His hedge of protection around you and to surround you with His peace. In such a situation it's actually helpful to speak out loud, and if someone else is there you can ask that person to join you in prayer as a powerful weapon.

Now let's suppose that this is not a spiritual attack but what we might call a normal human panic attack. The same thing works, because what you need is to calm yourself, reassure yourself that this is only temporary; it's a flash-back to some other previous situation, but now you're safe. Whenever this temptation or fear or guilt or oppression hits you, stop right there and thank God for His presence, because, 'In Him we live and move and breathe and have our being,' so you're in Him right now, even in this moment of panic. His power is protecting you and He gives you power. Ask Him to give you insight about what's triggered this thought or fear or temptation.

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When my daughter saw that billboard with a figure of a man with a gun, her reaction was a flashback to the many times in that country where she saw people carrying guns for real, and saw them treat others in horrible ways. Another lady I talked to had worked in a country where people got bombed and she told me of her experience of talking with friends and they were blasted right out from under her. What's going to happen to her when she hears a blast or a bomb or a car backfire? Well, her brain is going to take her right back to that experience and create a panic attack. We could call that a post-traumatic stress response. But there's a way out; she can receive healing for that: she could learn that the trigger for those past experiences is the same sounds or the same smells. Anything that reminds us of something hurtful from the past can trigger us into that panic state.

Another helpful strategy is to keep a journal each time you experience this, to say, 'Oh, I notice I'm having these panic attacks, or this particular attack, whenever I sit down to read scripture, or when I enter a room or when I'm around a tall person.' I keep a record of these and I begin to get insight into what triggers my attacks. I can talk to someone else, like a counsellor or a good friend whom I trust. And if I review this periodically, I'm going to gain insight into what happened in the past that caused me to feel terror or fear now.

Another important step is to practice praising God, that He is able to keep you from falling. Isn't that a wonderful reassurance? We feel like we're going to fall, but when we stumble, He holds us and we don't fall headlong. So God will continue to sustain you. When you call out to Him, He keeps you from falling, whether it's falling into depression, or terror or the clutches of our enemy.

Here's a sample prayer that you might pray in that instant response when this panic hits you:

'Jesus, save me from this work of the enemy; your Name has power over all evil. I'm not obligated to any evil, not to lies or to live in fear. You are the Victor, because you shed your blood on the cross for me. Lord Jesus, take this thought, or feeling or fear - whatever it is - I'm giving it to you. I'm tying it up in rope like a lasso and I'm laying it before you. It's not fit for me as a child of God. I refuse to believe this lie. I reject the works of the devil, fear. I resist the enemy in your name, Lord Jesus. I ask you to bind this evil, since with your death and your blood you put to flight all the powers of evil. You are the Victor over death, sin, deceit, lies, fear. Lord Jesus, through your Word and through your blood, I'm taking victory over this. Lord, you have given us, your children, power over evil. You gave me power to bind up evil - so I bind this up and I give it to you. Please send this lie back to Hell, along with Satan and his demons. When you speak, Lord Jesus, all the powers of Heaven and Earth listen, and all the demons shake and quake. Thank you for your power, Lord Jesus, because it's here for me now.'

As I'm sharing these ideas on what to do when you have a panic attack, perhaps you want to take a pencil and paper and jot these ideas down. Even if you don't need them right now, there may be a time later when you will need them, or perhaps someone that you know could benefit by what you share.