



## MAKE LEMONADE

STAY PRESENT MAMAS  
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# Chapter 4:

## From Anxious to Assured

By Becky Rosty

**This section is titled “From Anxious to Assured”**

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***Make Lemonade: Resist Crisis Mode, Redeem Stress, and Reclaim Your Joy***

The lake looked like a mirror last time. On our first trip to the Teton National Forest, we stayed at Coulter Bay campground and could not get enough of it. The lake at the feet of the three peaks shimmered like glass. We couldn't believe our stressful cross-state move had brought us so close to something so breathtaking.

So on our second trip to the Tetons, we had barely parked our camper before racing through the forest to the waters edge for our first glimpse of glory. There we witnessed a completely different lake. The waters, once captivatingly shimmery, were now choppy from an aggressive wind. The peaks were robed in fog, and the dark looming clouds above them felt threatening. Still, we stood and watched the lake. We threw rocks and climbed on boulders and took selfies. My kids zipped up their raincoats and pulled their hoods on tight so we could linger and watch the storm roll over the peaks.

I naively snapped photos and pointed out how the waves were getting bigger. I didn't not sense any danger, only fascination. A National Geographic photographer had his camera set up on the hill nearby, doing the same thing. Surely all the power rumbling in the distance would have no affect on my little family skipping through the wildflowers by the lake.

I wish I could say the rain hit us without warning; but clearly we had plenty of that. The clouds rolled in, faster than expected. Mr. National Geographic abandoned his post. We were the only fools left on the beach. My husband, who had been setting up camp, met us right at that moment. His wide eyes signaled we needed to move!

We herded the kids back to the tree line and started the hike just as the wind hit. The branches and our raincoats whipped at our faces, forcing heads down as we picked our way through the trail. With our campsite finally in view, I figured we had dodged the worst. Right then, the storm unleashed the rain. We reached the awning of our camper, but it was no use. I looked around at my kids, my husband, and my dog each soaked through by our 30 seconds in the deluge. We had to strip off our sopping wet clothes out in the open to try to keep the

camper dry. The storm raged, the dog howled, the kids whimpered at every loud clap of thunder. It consumed the night.

Whenever I think about anxiety, I picture that storm.

## **Anxiety is the New Black**

Anxiety is an ever-increasing problem in our world today. The rise of social media, generational shifts, and 24 hour news compounds a mom's ability to cope and think clearly. The world feels scarier, and we feel smaller. Our support systems have shifted, leading to isolation and the assumption that you must figure this out for yourself. General health and nutrition feels inaccessible, or unrealistic, which also adds to anxious reactions.

Whether a mom experiences anxious *feelings* or actual anxiety disorder (or other mental health diagnoses), the rising issue of fear-based motherhood is concerning. Kristin Cogan, MA, LPC writes,

“For anxious moms, the risk of depression, heart disease, diabetes, and other health issues is significantly higher due to chronic anxiety and stress. But it's not just the physical effects that are concerning. Constant anxiety can also erode positive feelings about motherhood, leading to feelings of guilt, sadness, and even detachment from your children.”<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps the most frustrating part about the anxiety pandemic is the constant falling-short solutions. Every book and website and podcast I researched say the same thing: take time to breathe, take something off your calendar, grow your support system, and when all else fails, seek medical help.

While these solutions can be helpful, they are often overwhelming for an anxious mama. You already feel like you aren't doing enough, now you need to add breathing and meditation to the to-do list? Little Billy has a difficult time making friends, now you have to drag him to your own coffee dates too? Your calendar might be overwhelming, but if Sally doesn't get to

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.imperfectlywonderful.com/blog/why-mom-anxiety-is-on-the-rise>

dance class, she might waste her talent. No matter how hard you try to conquer anxiety, you can't seem to shake this lemon that life has handed you. *Maybe it's just my personality*, you think. Or you label it a "season" and grit your teeth to get through it.

Like my day at the lake, the storm of anxiety seems far away, until it is on top of you, overwhelming each next step you try to take. As sure as a downpour leaves you drenched through your clothes, anxiety alters you. You are helpless against the deluge of worry. Anxiety whips like the wind, forcing you to keep your head down. In the end, the storm has stripped you of joy, peace, and a sense of presence. You are left exposed to the elements of the storm like my poor family that day in the Tetons.

I know these feelings all too well.

## **We have a Panic Problem**

It was on another camping trip that I hit my lowest point in motherhood, accompanied by an anxiety attack that left me flat on the ground.

Earlier that day, everything felt normal. Sausage sizzled on the Blackstone as the kids rolled out of their sleeping bags. Coffee steamed from my tin cup, a welcome warmth for the brisk mountain morning. Camping with 4 kids had never broken me before. Perhaps it's because I was already broken, but too busy to see it.

There's something about camping that takes you away from your lifelines—phone, TV, a full schedule, routine. These trustworthy distractions can keep you from realizing you are on the edge crazy. Until you pick up your life and plop it in a camper the size of your living room at the edge of a national forest. After a few days, the shame-bullies get louder.

Mine sounded like shushing, a pervasive self-loathing telling me to shut down. A closer listen, however, revealed it wasn't a *shushing*, but a "*should-be*":

"you *should* be in better shape, lose the baby weight already!",

"you *should* have better control over your reactions",

"you *should* be a more gentle parent."

“you *should* manage your kids’ behavior better”,  
and so on.

It was the last one that leveled me that day during the camping trip. My most stubborn child saw that camping trip as his prime opportunity to test my patience. He had just thrown a fit that sent hundreds of Lego pieces flying. Then he chose to sit still on a rug for over an hour instead of clean them up. This child was an expert in the art of the stand-off.

On an average day, I would escape to Instagram or busy myself with chores around the house to avoid the inner accusation that my child’s obstinance is a result of my flawed parenting. But we are camping. There was no vice to escape the howling wind of insecurity here.

And then comes the big one. The most ironic of all the shame-bullies: “you *should* be free from anxiety by now.”

Sensing the tension, my husband scooped up the baby to give me some room to breathe. I grabbed a nylon hammock and trotted toward the tree line, ready to put distance between myself and the kids.

Frustratingly, the postpartum rage only ratcheted up. I forced my breath through flared nostrils, angry prayers tumbling through my mind as I yanked the hammock straps into place. Easing my body into the blue cradle didn’t give me the peace I was hoping for. At last, with the sun streaming between pine branches onto my closed eye-lids, I felt my heart-rate relax.

Suddenly, the sound of a gun-shot rang through the forest. All my senses snapped into high-alert, fight-or-flight mode taking over as another shot was fired. And another, and another. In the back of my mind, I knew someone was probably just aligning their gun-scope or shooting pop cans. But the intrusive thoughts were running wild, stampeding over the rational ones. I envisioned my family being brutally murdered, and the last thing I said to them was how frustrating they are to me.

The storm had fully taken over my mind. I flung myself out of the hammock and tried to retrace my steps. Sharp twigs snapped under my Chaco's as I stumbled between trees where

the air felt thick, closing in around me. The tightness in my chest confirmed it—I was having a panic attack.

The sound of dozens more shots peppered the air, forcing panic to rise like the lump in my throat. Eventually, I caught sight of the campsite; my husband and children were playing in the blissful mountain air. What I saw was all peace, but my mind was still chaos.

I stumbled into the clearing, collapsing onto the hard mountain earth. My husband walked over, confused but calm, and stroked my hair. My kids gaped at me with wide eyes. I was keenly aware in that moment that this was my lowest point.

And I wasn't planning to stay there.

## **From Stormy-Mind to Sound Mind**

It is important to note that God's plan for us *does* include stormy situations. There will be trials, frustrations, set backs, and bumps in the road. You will get discouraged, persecuted even. You will make mistakes and face consequences. The storms of life are often God's most effective labs for our spiritual growth. However, the Bible never—not once—prescribes a stormy mind.

In fact, when it comes to anxiety, God's Word is explicit in His command: **don't**.

**“do not** be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.” Philippians 4:6 ESV

“Therefore I tell you: **Don't** worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; or about your body, what you will wear. ...” Matthew 6:25 CSB

“Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. **Don't** let your heart be troubled or fearful.” John 14:27 CSB

## *Make Lemonade*

“Haven’t I commanded you: be strong and courageous? **Do not** be afraid or discouraged, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.” Joshua 1:9 CSB

(All emphasize mine)

That’s a lot of *do-not*’s. There isn’t a lot of wiggle room here. These are not suggestions. These are commands straight from Scripture—commands meant to free us from the chokehold of anxiety.

I find this fascinating because we are encouraged to experience other emotions—even negative ones—just the way they are. Ephesians 4:26 says “be angry, and do not sin.” It does not say “don’t be angry.” The Psalms is full of up and down feelings, and no evidence of God pointing fingers at the psalmist for experiencing those feelings. Ecclesiastes 7:3 goes as far as to say “grief is better than laughter...” a stark contrast to the commands regarding joy also found in that same book.

The Bible winks at these nuances, and gives us freedom to experience emotions in our human experience. But it **does not** give us permission to be anxious.

God actively commands us to not be anxious because anxiety does not align with His design. You *will* have to face stormy circumstances but you were never meant to have a stormy mind.

“For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.”

2 Timothy 1:7 NKJV

I love that phrase *sound mind*. It reminds me of a unique body of water found on some coastlines. A *sound* is a protected inlet of ocean water where young, growing fish and animals thrive. It also provides safety for ships seeking shelter from the larger waves of the grander ocean. As PBS researcher Frank Graff said, “When one was out in the stormy sea, it was good



to finally make your way to the calmer and safer waters of the harbor—to be ‘safe and sound.’”<sup>2</sup>

God designed us to have protected minds, where growth and life can flourish. This is the opposite of a stormy-mind. A woman of sound-mind does not over-think. Instead of spinning her wheels—strategizing every do-over or do-better she could accomplish—she exercises self-control and self-discipline. A woman of sound-mind is not beat down by the wind of worry; her head is held high in dignity and trust. A woman of sound-mind still encounters storms in this life, but she herself does not become the storm.

Sounds like a dream right? How do we get to this magical place of soundness of mind? It is not by following the best anti-anxiety accounts on Instagram. Nor will it come by sheer will power. Medications can work wonders (yay meds!) but they still won't ever make you stronger than the anxious thoughts. This is actually good news. You can't do “hard things” when it comes to altering the chemistry of the mind. But you do know Someone who can.

## **Praise to the Calmer of Storms**

In 1 Peter 3, God's Word gives a specific charge to women:

“Don't be concerned about the outward beauty of fancy hairstyles, expensive jewelry, or beautiful clothes. You should clothe yourselves instead with the beauty that comes from within, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is so precious to God.”<sup>1</sup>

Peter 3:3-4 NLT

I remember reading this passage in 10th grade. It aggravated me so much that I threw my Bible across the room. I was discovering my identity at the time, becoming more and more comfortable with my loud, outgoing personality. At first glance, this passage seemed to say that girls like me were annoying to God. His favorites were the soft-spoken ladies who never shared an opinion of their own.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.pbsnc.org/blogs/science/why-some-small-bodies-of-water-are-called-sounds/>

## *Make Lemonade*

Thankfully, God did not let me continue this line of thinking for very long. His gentle whisper prompted me to walk across the room, pick up my Bible, and read Mark 4:37-39:

“A great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking over the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. He [Jesus] was in the stern, sleeping on the cushion. So they woke him up and said to him, “Teacher! Don’t you care that we’re going to die?” He got up, rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, “Silence! Be still!” The wind ceased, and there was a great calm.” Mark 4:37-39 CSB

It did not take long for me to realize that what is counted as “very precious to God” is a spirit that is surrendered to Him. When the storms of life rage, I could respond with a stormy spirit, or I could call on the Calmer of storms to make my mind gentle and quiet.

This has nothing to do with my personality. It has everything to do with who is in charge of the boat. If I am in charge, it will be stormy every time. If I cling to Jesus, he will anchor my mind in the sound, where the waters are gentle and quiet.

The illuminating truth here is this: You cannot have a sound mind without submitting to Jesus. Therapy, mindfulness, and medications can work wonders (I know from experience). But ultimately, if you do as psychologists recommend and deconstruct your anxiety enough, you will find that the ultimate issue is you need a Savior. Jesus is more than willing to save your soul, not just for eternity in the afterlife, but for satisfaction and joy today. He is the one who has all power over every storm. We must come to him.

God is not surprised by this—it is his idea. And yet, so often we wander through motherhood wondering why we are so anxious and worried. Sometimes we need to silence the loud messages of “you are strong enough” so we can listen to the one who is.

### 3 Steps to a Sound Mind

Aren't you glad God's Word doesn't stop at "don't be anxious"? Our kind Father gives us next steps for how to deal with the storm in the mind threatening to steal joy:

"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."

Philippians 4:6-7 ESV

When you are on the verge of a storm in your spirit, don't linger, like I did that day at the lake. When you see the storm of anxiety coming, start hiking to shelter. According to this passage, it is only three steps away:

**Step 1: Connect with Jesus.** This is the most simple way to describe prayer: connecting with Jesus. The New Living Translation puts it this way: "Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything..." Philippians 4:6 NLT

The world will tell you to minimize your anxiety. "Stop making it such a big deal" they say. So you try to ignore the anxious thoughts, piling on busyness or numbing out with distractions. When minimizing doesn't work, you try to maximize your own power. You recite affirmations about your strength and capability, hoping to feel big and stronger than the anxious storm inside.

I've seen a lot of storm-based thriller films. People are never bigger or stronger than storms. They might be able to survive the tempest, but certainly not overpower it. I think we need to have a similar respect for the storm in the mind. The Bible does not say "overcome your anxiety" nor does it say "stop letting anxiety be so overwhelming". It tells us to simply turn to the one with real power to calm the storm.

The enemy hates this. Satan loves it when our eyes are fixated on the storm instead of the Savior. He knows we will sink, like Peter did in Matthew 14:

"Meanwhile, the boat was already some distance from land, battered by the waves, because the wind was against them. Jesus came toward them walking on the sea very

## *Make Lemonade*

early in the morning. When the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified. “It’s a ghost! ” they said, and they cried out in fear. Immediately Jesus spoke to them. “Have courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.” “Lord, if it’s you,” Peter answered him, “command me to come to you on the water.” He said, “Come.” And climbing out of the boat, Peter started walking on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the strength of the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, “Lord, save me! ” Immediately Jesus reached out his hand, caught hold of him, and said to him, “You of little faith, why did you doubt? ” When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. Then those in the boat worshiped him and said, “Truly you are the Son of God.” ” Matthew 14:24-33 CSB

When you sense the storm of anxiety coming: pray. Turn your eyes off the storm and onto Jesus. Go for a prayer walk. Do dishes or tidy your house as you talk to God. Keep a prayer journal or pray through the book of Psalms or Proverbs. Play worship music and pray the lyrics as you sing them. Try moving meditation and pray while you stretch. Keep it simple and just talk with your Father.

**Step 2: Give Thanks.** This step is so subtle, we often miss it! It seems like a tag-along in the verse, like Paul is saying “oh yeah—with thanksgiving”. But it is SO much more than that. Taking time to list the things you are grateful for is one of the most powerful practices against anxiety. You are literally stacking the deck against your worries by remembering all the ways God has come through in the past.

Even secular science agrees. An article for Anxiety & Depression Association of America, Dr. Ashley Smith says,

“The content of anxious and depressive thinking is often negative in nature. Common forms of negative thinking include: overly focusing on negative aspects or problem areas (called the negativity bias), discounting the positives (“yeah but”-ing away any positive aspect or occurrence), and catastrophizing or jumping to the worst case scenario...”

We also spiral in the storm of anxiety by forecasting or time traveling to the past in our minds. Like the little orange character in *Inside Out 2*, we become professionals at dreaming up possible scenarios that make us feel threatened. The wind and rain beating down until we can't see our next right step. Dr. Smith recommends gratitude as a competing response:

“It’s surprisingly difficult to tap into gratitude – really tap into it – and also get stuck in negativity. When you find yourself getting wrapped up in those negative thoughts or starting down a spiral, challenge your mind to find something in that moment to be grateful for. In doing so, you’re combating the negative content of your thoughts AND bringing your mind into the present.”<sup>3</sup>

We typically think of gratitude as a state of being: I should *be* more grateful. We view it as a destination to arrive at if we just count our blessings enough. However, I am convinced that gratitude is not a destination but a vehicle.

No one ever says “I should spend more time in my car/on the bus.” No, the point of the vehicle is to get them to where they want to go. In this case, you want to be content, satisfied, joyful, and confident. You want to dwell in soundness of mind. You want to leave anxious thoughts in the dust and get to a destination of assurance. Thankfulness is the vehicle that gets you there. It’s got a bumper sticker that says “Peace of Mind or Bust”. Hop in, sister, and enjoy the roadtrip of gratitude.

**Step 3: Ask for What You Need.** Somewhere in your childhood, you were probably shushed for asking too many questions. Often, we assume God is annoyed with us for asking for stuff. Of course, we don’t want to treat God like a genie or Santa Clause. However, I think most of us hesitate to really pray about our worries, even though God has invited us to do so!

I love how The Message paraphrases our verse:

“Don’t fret or worry. Instead of worrying, pray. Let petitions and praises shape your worries into prayers, letting God know your concerns. Before you know it, a sense of

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<sup>3</sup> <https://adaa.org/learn-from-us/from-the-experts/blog-posts/consumer/gratitude-mental-health-game-changer>

## *Make Lemonade*

God's wholeness, everything coming together for good, will come and settle you down.

It's wonderful what happens when Christ displaces worry at the center of your life."

Philippians 4:6-7 MSG

What do you need, friend? Are you anxious about your children, finances, a difficult relationship? Are you forecasting what bad thing will happen or ruminating on a past mistake? Are you riddled with guilt and worried how you will ever feel free? Are you simply having trouble sleeping? Bring it all to the foot of the Father. He is waiting with arms wide open! Here's proof:

"Until now you have asked for nothing in my name. Ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be complete." John 16:24 CSB

"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him." James 1:5 ESV

"You will keep the mind that is dependent on you in perfect peace, for it is trusting in you." Isaiah 26:3 CSB

"Answer me when I call, God, who vindicates me. You freed me from affliction; be gracious to me and hear my prayer. I will both lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, Lord, make me live in safety." Psalms 4:1, 8 CSB

"Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." Hebrews 4:16 ESV

As you ask God for what you need, remember to let go of you preconceived ideas on what His answer is supposed to look like. It may be that you ask for healing and God gives you wisdom to find the medical help you need. It may take years of asking and waiting on the

Lord as He moves in the right timing, holding your hand in the waiting room. It may look like repentance more than miracles. He may still the storm in the mind but not the storm in the moment. Keep asking, keep trusting.

## **Assurance Insured**

Turning anxiety into assurance isn't complicated. You don't have to discover a new formula for freedom. Follow the 3 steps away from anxiety and you will find yourself safe and sound in His presence. The rest of my story is living proof.

As I lay on that hard mountain earth, contemplating shame, embarrassment, fear, and the sudden need to find a bathroom, I asked God for help. Just a simple prayer for help. For a moment, I couldn't see past my anxiety; but eventually, I caught my breath.

I sat up.

Then stood up.

I walked back to our camper and drank some water.

I breathed another prayer for help; I hugged my son.

I fed the baby.

I joined my family around the campfire.

I slept and woke up to new mercies in the morning.

The next week at home, I had another episode of mom-rage and panic, reminding me that healing is rarely linear. But this time, I chose not to dull my senses with screen time. I jogged

## *Make Lemonade*

myself to the house of a friend I knew would pray for me. And my walk into assurance continued.

I made an appointment with a doctor.

I followed through with the appointment.

And when that doctor was not willing to dig deeper into what I suspected was a chemical imbalance, I found a new doctor that would.

And I kept asking God for help.

He gave me wisdom to get my bloodwork done. I started taking supplements in the morning and long walks in the evening.

He gave me self-control to reset my metabolism through nutrition. Soon, I saw my hormones re-balanced and my mood swings disappeared.

He gave me a taste for beautiful things. So I deleted apps and made time to call out the shame-bullies with the truth of God's Word.

With the Holy Spirit's help, I crawled out of the pit of "should be's". I straightened my spine and chose to stand tall, a posture claiming the dignity Jesus has already given me as a child of God.

What I thought was the story of my lowest point became a portrait of victory!

Later that summer, we revisited that campsite. After weeks on my new supplements, including focused prayer, I was feeling less anxious and more assured.



## *Make Lemonade*

I took my son for a walk in the woods. We laughed and raced and poked cow pies with sticks. The peace between us was so different from months before. This time I was drawing closer not adding distance. This time, I walked with care.

Our stroll brought us to a clearing littered with shards of orange clay targets. We had stumbled upon the source of the gunshot sounds. The event that rattled me to my breaking point was just playtime for someone else. And now, in my newfound freedom, I could laugh about that (Proverbs 31:25). Because even when I am at my lowest point, King Jesus had never left his high point on the throne. And He says I am seated *with Him* in the heavens!

“He also raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavens in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might display the immeasurable riches of his grace through his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.” Ephesians 2:6-7

This means that even when I am frustrated by insecurity or exasperated with my shortcomings, Jesus sees me already on the other side, already confident, already at ease with myself, already walking in freedom! To the Lord, my lowest points (and I am sure there are several still to come) are simply a canvas to show off His resurrection power through my life!

That brings me more assurance than I could imagine. I cannot think of a higher honor than that.

“For we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you. Indeed, everything is for your benefit so that, as grace extends through more and more people, it may cause thanksgiving to increase to the glory of God.” 2 Corinthians 4:14-15

## **Squeeze the Day:**

### **PERSONAL REFLECTION OR GROUP DISCUSSION:**

1. Where do you like to vacation: the ocean or the mountains?
2. How would you describe being storm minded? How does anxiety affect you mentally, emotionally, or spiritually?
3. Visualize a time when you experienced assurance and security? What was it like? (Or picture what you think it would look like).
4. Which of the 3 steps toward soundness of mind do you want to practice more this week?

### **SCRIPTURE:**

Read Luke 10:38-42. From the outside, would you say that Martha struggled with anxiety? And yet Jesus gently brought Martha's stormy-mind to her attention, not to shame her, but to help her see a different way to order her mind. What other nuances about anxiety do you spot? How does Jesus lift both women up just by being present with them?

### **LISTEN TO:**

*Rule* by Hillside Recording, Eliza King

*Peace Be Still—The Selah Session* by Hope Darst