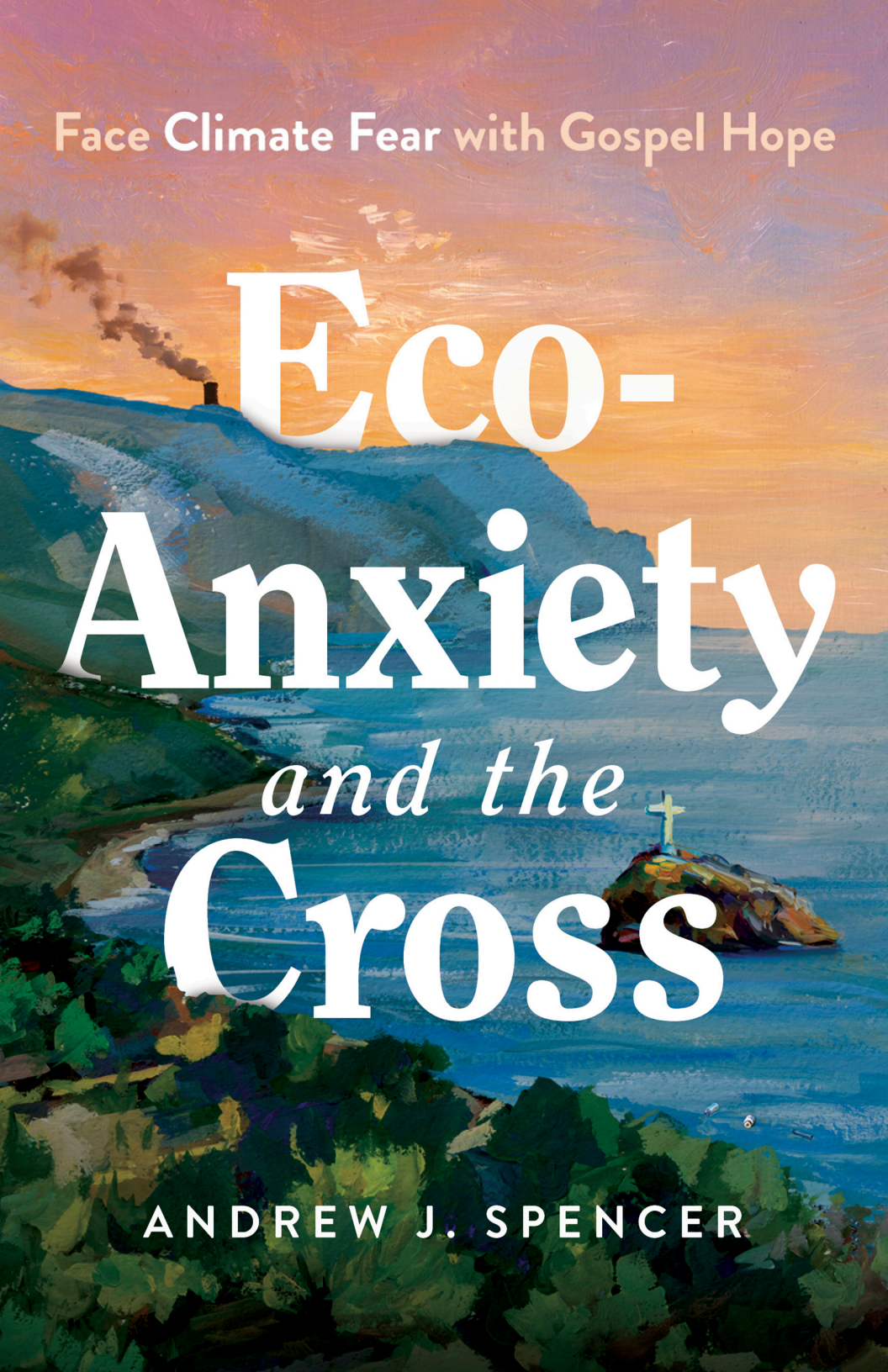




Face Climate Fear with Gospel Hope

Eco- Anxiety *and the* Cross

ANDREW J. SPENCER

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Anxiety**
and the
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PART 1

Understanding Eco-Anxiety

CHAPTER 1

What Is Eco-Anxiety?

Sam Bilal began having climate disaster nightmares when he was only six years old. He watched Al Gore's documentary, *An Inconvenient Truth*, and became convinced that his city would be flooded by rising sea levels. The images of a seemingly inevitable global climate catastrophe hit him like a freight train and haunted his dreams. Afterward, anxiety about the environment hovered over his childhood like a dark cloud and continues to shape his life as a young adult.¹

Sam isn't alone. Millions of young people endure overwhelming anxiety every day, concerned about potential future environmental disasters and what they may mean for their lives. That's eco-anxiety.

1. Melissa Gomez, "Facing Extreme Heat and Drought, Young Californians Cope to Beat Climate Anxiety and Doom," *Los Angeles Times*, August 8, 2022, <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2022-08-08/young-california-people-climate-anxiety-heat-wave-drought>.

In a global survey, around 45 percent of adolescents (sixteen to twenty-five years old) say that their worry about the planet affects the way they live each day. Seventy-five percent of American adolescents report moderate to extreme worry about climate change.²

If you struggle with eco-anxiety, you're not alone, but you don't have to struggle with eco-anxiety forever. The Bible offers us hope, even in the face of the worst sorts of dangers.

This book is an invitation for people struggling with eco-anxiety to overcome it while still caring deeply about the environment. There are many environmental problems in this world, but we also have many reasons for hope.

The key to overcoming eco-anxiety is hope. We should have hope for God's creation.³ Humans are capable of substantial damage to the environment, but God loves his creation, and he's going to renew it. He's promised it, so we can trust him (Rom. 8:19–22). That's where we're going to begin this journey, but there's a lot more ahead, so hang on.

What Is Eco-Anxiety?

Although every culture throughout history has experienced anxiety about the climate, *eco-anxiety* is a relatively new term.

2. Caroline Hickman, et al., "Climate Anxiety in Children and Young People and Their Beliefs About Government Responses to Climate Change: A Global Survey," *The Lancet Planetary Health* 5, issue 12: e863–e873, [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanplh/article/PIIS2542-5196\(21\)00278-3/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanplh/article/PIIS2542-5196(21)00278-3/fulltext).

3. Andrew Spencer, *Hope for God's Creation: Stewardship in an Age of Futility* (B&H Academic, 2023).

According to the Google Books Ngram tool, terms like *climate anxiety* and *eco-anxiety* were basically unknown prior to 2005 and didn't become popular until 2016.⁴

If you've picked up this book, there's a good chance you've experienced eco-anxiety firsthand. But it's also helpful to find out how experts define the term.

According to psychiatrist Britt Wray, eco-anxiety "describes a condition that robs sleep from those who, when all is dark and quiet, stir in thoughts of how uninhabitable the Earth will soon become."⁵ It's a serious and persistent negative emotion.

Psychoanalyst Anouchka Grose defines eco-anxiety as "a state of distress caused by concern about damage to the environment."⁶ Greenpeace, UK, expands the definition to include how people's failure to respond to environmental concern adds to the anxiety:

Eco-anxiety (or climate anxiety) is a feeling of distress that comes from thinking about environmental breakdown, based on what we see happening around us. It also covers the distress we feel when people around us don't get it,

4. Google Ngram Viewer, "eco-anxiety, climate anxiety, eco anxiety," graph of usage frequency for years 2000–2022, smoothing 3, English corpus, Google Books, accessed August 27, 2025, https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=eco-anxiety%2Cclimate+anxiety%2Ceco+anxiety&year_start=2000&year_end=2022&corpus=en&smoothing=3&case_insensitive=false.

5. Britt Wray, *Generation Dread: Finding Purpose in an Age of Climate Anxiety* (The Experiment, 2022), 3.

6. Anouchka Grose, *How to Manage Your Eco-Anxiety: An Empowering Guide for Young People* (Harry Abrams, 2024), 45.

refuse to take action, or attack, shame or silence us for how we feel.⁷

The Greenpeace definition is more expansive, but it gets at the frustration many young people feel with their parents and neighbors. They feel like people just aren't concerned enough about the environment.

There are also other terms for similar experiences, like *climate trauma*, *climate grief*, and *climate anxiety*. For simplicity, I will lump all these ideas under the term *eco-anxiety*.

Is Eco-Anxiety a Mental Illness?

Eco-anxiety isn't classified as a mental illness according to the DSM-5, the approved list of possible diagnoses for mental health disorders.⁸ There are several varieties of general anxiety in the list, but none of them point to the environment as the cause. As a result, there's an ongoing debate among experts about whether eco-anxiety is really a mental health issue.

Sometimes eco-anxiety is treated under the diagnosis for Generalized Anxiety Disorder. As one clinical psychologist notes, "Climate anxiety is highly correlated with generalized anxiety, so

7. Leah Das, "Eco-Anxiety: How to Find Hope in a Climate Crisis," Greenpeace UK, June 22, 2023, <https://www.greenpeace.org.uk/news/eco-anxiety-how-to-find-radical-hope-in-a-climate-crisis>.

8. American Psychiatric Association, *DSM-V Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). As of the September 2025 update, no specific diagnosis has been added for climate anxiety.

it tends to affect people who are already anxious about other things.”⁹ The clinical definition of Generalized Anxiety Disorder involves “excessive anxiety and worry” with symptoms present more often than not for six months.¹⁰

It’s the “clearly excessive” piece that gives rise to the debate about the nature of eco-anxiety.

Those who argue that eco-anxiety isn’t a mental illness often believe people’s anxious “feelings are a healthy response to the climate crisis.”¹¹ The experts don’t doubt the severity or duration of the negative feelings that come with eco-anxiety, but they think severe worry is justified by the condition of the environment.

Additionally, some experts describe eco-anxiety as a good thing. For example, Anouchka Grose writes, “Not only can [eco-anxiety] be a friend, but also a life coach and trusted advisor. Your eco-anxiety is prodding you to take climate action. The reason it feels nasty is because it means business. It won’t stop until it feels listened to. This is the science of eco-anxiety.”¹²

The sort of anxiety Grose is describing is paralyzing. It usually doesn’t lead to activism. Rather, it often leads to feelings of guilt and self-loathing that keep people from working to solve the problems.

9. “Yale Experts Explain Climate Anxiety,” *Yale Sustainability*, March 13, 2023, <https://sustainability.yale.edu/explainers/yale-experts-explain-climate-anxiety>.

10. American Psychiatric Association, *DSM-V Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 222.

11. Das, “Eco-Anxiety: How to Find Hope in a Climate Crisis.”

12. Grose, *How to Manage Your Eco-Anxiety*, 16.

We shouldn't celebrate the perpetual feeling of worry that eco-anxiety brings. It tires us out instead of propelling us toward action. We need to find a better way forward.

Eco-anxiety doesn't need to be a permanent part of anyone's life. In fact, I believe that the gospel points us toward hope that helps us overcome it. You may be skeptical right now, but this book is about discovering hope in the face of eco-anxiety.

How Can I Find Hope?

I wish that overcoming eco-anxiety were easy. I wish that you could just take a pill, push a button, or go to a two-week summer camp that changes the way you feel. However, eco-anxiety is deeply embedded in some people's lives. It takes time and consistent focus on hope to overcome it.

Hope isn't wishful thinking. It isn't ignoring environmental problems. Real hope leads to action. As Christians, we should care about the environment. Treating creation well is one way we demonstrate our love for God and neighbor. Our hope for creation is grounded in the truth of the gospel.

At the heart of the gospel is the fact that God became a human named Jesus Christ. He lived a perfect life. He never lied, stole, had a selfish thought, or abused the environment. Yet he died in our place as an answer to all the sin in the world—the sin that we've committed against others, against God, and even the sin we've committed against the environment.

To pay for our sins, Jesus Christ was unjustly executed by the Roman Empire. But he didn't stay dead. In fact, he physically rose from the grave. Jesus is alive today.

The reality of Jesus's death, burial, and resurrection gives us hope as we live this life. We will live eternally with him in the new heavens and new earth if we repent of our sin, trust in his promise, and follow him as Lord.

There is, however, much more to eternal life than having our sins forgiven. The gospel contains the promise that one day Jesus will return to this earth and renew it. He will take away all the effects of sin from his creation. We don't know when, but we know it will happen.

The reality of Jesus's death, burial, and resurrection gives us hope as we live this life.

We don't need to be fatalistic about the environment and stop trying to care for creation. However, we must recognize that as long as there is sin in the world, there are going to be environmental problems.

One day, we'll live in a world without sin. Natural evils like hurricanes, earthquakes, thorns and thistles, which are the result of Adam's original sin, will be no more in the new creation (cf. Gen. 3:17–19). We will no longer need the reminder of destructive storms and natural disasters to remind us to repent (cf. Luke 13:4–5).

Furthermore, our communal sin, which leads to the collective overuse of natural resources, will cease to exist. Our new, redeemed society will live within its means. Most significantly,

our individual sin nature will be purged so that we will be satisfied with our daily bread and able to live within creation's limits, as perfect stewards of the new creation.

The social and environmental problems that are unsolvable in this life are already solved by Jesus's resurrection. We're just waiting to see the final changes. In the meantime, we hold onto the hope of the gospel.

Is Hope Enough to Overcome Eco-Anxiety?

The first step for overcoming eco-anxiety is understanding the hope we have in the gospel. The resurrection is God's promise that he's personally going to set this world back in order one day. That may not make sense to you yet but keep reading.

There's more to overcoming eco-anxiety than simply looking forward to the "pie in the sky when you die." We need to understand why the threat of climate change, pollution, and natural disasters is making people more anxious than the threat of global nuclear war or widespread drought ever did. Our access to information is a big reason why we're so anxious.

Additionally, as we're trying to overcome anxiety, we need to understand what the Bible says about it. This isn't the first time fear and anxiety have been a problem. God has something to say about it. The Bible also has much to say about why we should take care of creation. We'll dig into that as we consider why we can have hope for God's creation and think about how we can live.

Still, a book like this wouldn't be worth reading if there weren't some practical solutions, too. The last few chapters offer basic steps to overcome eco-anxiety and care for God's creation. You will have to do some work to figure out how those suggestions apply to you specifically—there are just too many possibilities for me to guess what will work for you—but I think you'll be surprised to find that doing something meaningful will give you hope for the future.

There's much to cover, but it'll be worth it. And if we stick together, we can overcome eco-anxiety while caring about creation for God's glory.

Eco-Anxiety and the Cross offers hope for a worried world.

This book is written for anyone feeling overwhelmed by the headlines or burdened by the state of our planet. This book also brings together real environmental challenges, the emotional weight of climate anxiety, and the hope that flows from the story of God's redemptive love for all of creation. With care for both mind and spirit, it addresses the often hyperbolic language of climate activism while anchoring readers in the biblical conviction that God has not abandoned his world, but rather is leading it toward renewal.

Blending biblical wisdom and practical wisdom, this book guides anxious readers from despair to purpose. It offers a clear-eyed truth about the planet's struggles but refuses to leave readers paralyzed by guilt or dread. Instead, it describes how Christians can embody hope in daily life, grounded in Christ's resurrection and the promise of a restored creation. With chapters on managing fear, discerning facts, praying as creation groans, along with suggestions for simple but meaningful ways to care for the earth, this book is a practical field guide for living hopefully amidst environmental problems.

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