



# Depression & Anxiety

## Allowing the Gospel to Speak to Our Emotional Suffering

*Presentation By:*

**Brad Hambrick, M.Div., Th.M.**

Pastor of Counseling, The Summit Church



# Overcoming Depression-Anxiety: A Suffering Paradigm

## Table of Contents

### Introduction:

What Can I Hope to Get from this Seminar? .....	3
Where Do I Begin? .....	4
Why Two 9 Steps Models .....	5

### Seminar Content:

<b>Chapter 1. “Starting a Hard Journey on Empty”</b> PREPARE yourself physically, emotionally, and spiritually to face your suffering .....	6
<b>Chapter 2 “Facing the Pain Without Running Away”</b> ACKNOWLEDGE the specific history and realness of my suffering .....	13
<b>Chapter 3. “Why Does Depression-Anxiety Hurt So Bad?”</b> UNDERSTAND the impact of my suffering .....	21
<b>Chapter 4. “I Can Feel My Depression-Anxiety Becoming ‘Who I Am’”</b> LEARN MY SUFFERING STORY which I used to make sense of my experience .....	28
<b>Chapter 5. “God, Can We Rest on this Journey?”</b> MOURN the wrongness of what happened and receive God’s comfort .....	36
<b>Chapter 6. “Hard Emotions in a Redemptive Story”</b> LEARN MY GOSPEL STORY by which God gives meaning to my experience .....	44
<b>Chapter 7. “Reclaiming My Life from Depression-Anxiety”</b> IDENTIFY GOALS that allow me to combat the impact of my suffering .....	52
<b>Chapter 8. “When the Road Becomes Long More Than Steep”</b> PERSEVERE in the new life and identity to which God has called me .....	62
<b>Chapter 9. “After Depression-Anxiety, Now What?”</b> STEWARDSHIP all of my life for God’s glory .....	70

### Appendices:

A. 6 Steps to Wise Decision Making About Psychotropic Medications .....	75
B. Commitment to Life Agreement & Suicide Counseling First Aid .....	79
C. What Do I Do Now? .....	81

## What Can I Hope to Get From this Seminar?

Whether you are here due to personal need, the needs of others, or for a general interest in the topic, we hope this seminar will benefit you. If we do our job well, parts of this seminar will speak to you personally. There will also be parts that speak to aspects of this subject that are different from your own experience. What follows are **six unavoidable facts** that should help you profit from all of the material you hear (bold faced text taken from Paul Tripp and Tim Lane *How People Change*):

**1. Someone in your life had a problem this week.** That person may be you. Even if you are here for yourself, chances are you know or will know others who struggle in this area. Because we live in a fallen world and have a sin nature, we can be certain that we will battle with sin and suffering in our lives. Because we love people, we can be certain we will be called on to love and assist others in their battle with sin and suffering.

**2. We have everything we need in the Gospel to help that person (2 Peter 1:3).** God has given us Himself, the Gospel, the Bible, and the church and promised they are effective for all things that pertain to life and godliness. Our task as Christians is to grow in our understanding of and ability to skillfully apply these resources to our struggles. These resources are the essence and source of "good advice," and we hope to play a role in your efforts to apply and disseminate this "good advice." We do not aim to present new material, but new ways of applying the timeless, eternal truths of the Gospel found in Scripture.

**3. That person will seek help from friends, family members, or pastors before seeking professionals.** Counseling (broadly defined as seeking to offer hope and direction through relationship) happens all the time. We talk with friends over the phone, crying children in their rooms, spouses in the kitchen, fellow church members between services, and have endless conversations with ourselves. We listen to struggles, seek to understand, offer perspective, give advice, and follow up later. This is what the New Testament calls "one-anothering" and something we are all called to do.

**4. That person either got no help, bad help, or biblical, gospel-centered help.** Not all counseling is good counseling. Not all advice that we receive from a Christian (even a Christian counselor) is Christian advice. Too often we are advised to look within for the answers to our problems or told that we are good enough, strong enough, or smart enough in ourselves to overcome. Hopefully you will see today how the Bible calls us to something (rather Someone) better, bigger, and more effective than these messages.

**5. If they did not get meaningful help, they will go elsewhere.** When we do not receive good advice (pointing us to enduring life transformation), we keep looking. We need answers to our struggles. This means that as people find unfulfilling answers they will eventually (by God's grace) come to a Christian for advice. When they eventually come to you, we hope you will be more prepared because of our time together today.

**6. Whatever help they received, they will use to help others!** We become evangelists for the things that make life better (this is why the Gospel is simply called "Good News"). We quite naturally share the things that we find to be effective. Our prayer for you today is that you will find the material presented effective for your struggles and that you will be so comforted and encouraged by it that it will enable you to be a more passionate and effective ambassador of the Gospel in the midst of "normal" daily conversations.

## “Where Do I Begin?”

In life and counseling, finding the starting point can be difficult. Life is fluid enough that identifying where to begin with a life-dominating or complex struggle can feel like finding the beginning of a circle. In order to help you with this very important question, a five-level triage progression is outlined below.

A struggle in one of the higher categories may have many expressions or contributing causes in the lower categories. For example, someone who is suicidal (level one – safety concern) may need to learn to manage their finances better (level five – skill concern) because pending bankruptcy fuels their sense of hopelessness.

However, unless the upper level concerns are addressed first, efforts at change have a low probability of lasting success. The individual above needs to be stabilized before they would be able to implement a budget or debt-reduction plan. Similarly, a person with a substance abuse problem (level two – addiction concern) may have anger management issues (level four – character concern), but until the abuse of a mind-mood altering substance is removed attempts at learning emotional regulation and how to honor others in times of disappointment will be short-lived.

This is why the higher concerns are recommended to be addressed first and significant progress to be made in those areas before beginning to focus on the lower level concerns.

One final point before we examine five levels of triage. In the higher categories denial is likely to be stronger complicating factor. For example: abusers (level one), addicts (level two), and those who have been traumatized (level three) are very prone to deny or minimize the impact of their struggle. The benefit of this tool is that it provides a reasonable system to appeal to in order help these individuals see why it is not sufficient to just “be nicer” (level four) and learn to “do better” (level five).

**1. Safety:** When the basic requirements of safety are not present, then safety takes priority over any other concern. Safety is never an “unfair expectation” from a relationship. If safety is a concern, then you should immediately involve other people (i.e., pastor, counselor, or legal authorities).

This category includes: thoughts of suicide, violence, threats of violence (to people or pets), preventing someone from moving freely in their home, destruction of property, manipulation, coercion, and similar practices.

**2. Substance Abuse / Addiction:** After safety, the use of mind or mood altering substances is the next level of priority concern. Substance abuse makes an individual’s life situation worse and inhibits any maturation process. The consistency and stability required for lasting change are disrupted by substance abuse.

This category includes: alcohol, illegal drugs, prescription drug not used according to instructions, inhalants, driving any vehicle with any impairment for any distance, and similar activities.

**3. Trauma:** Past or present events resulting in nightmares, sleeplessness, flashbacks, sense of helplessness, restricted emotional expression, difficulty concentrating, high levels of anxiety, intense feelings of shame, or a strong desire to isolate should be dealt with before trying to refine matters of character or skill. Trauma is a form of suffering that negatively shapes someone’s sense of identity and causes them to begin to constantly expect or brace against the worst.

This category includes: any physical or sexual abuse, significant verbal or emotional abuse, exposure to an act of violence, experience of a disaster, a major loss, or similar experience.

**4. Character:** This refers to persistent dispositions that express themselves in a variety of ways in a variety of settings. Because both the “trigger” and manifestation change regularly and hide when convenient, it is clear that the struggle lies within the core values, beliefs, and priorities of the individual. Skill training alone will not change character.

This category includes: anger, bitterness, fear, greed, jealousy, obsessions, hoarding, envy, laziness, selfishness, pornography, codependency, depression, social anxiety, insecurity, and similar dispositions.

**5. Skill:** With skill level changes there will usually be a high degree of self-awareness that change is needed in the moment when change is needed. However, confusion or uncertainty prevents an individual from being able to respond in a manner that it is wise and appropriate.

This category includes: conflict resolution, time management, budgeting, planning, and similar skills.

Hopefully, after reading these five points, you will have less of a “jump in anywhere and try anything” mentality towards your struggles or those of your friends. Change is hard but knowing where to start helps to establish confidence. Remember, you are not alone. Christ will meet you and the church will walk with you at any of these five points.

## Why Two 9 Steps Models?

We, The Summit Church, do not believe there is a one-size-fits-all solution to the struggles of life. Neither do we believe there is any magic in these particular steps. However, we do believe that these steps capture the major movements of the Gospel in the life of an individual. We also believe that it is through the Gospel that God transforms lives and modifies behavior as He gives us a new heart.

We believe that the Gospel speaks to both sin (things we do wrong) and suffering (painful experiences for which we are not responsible) to bring peace, wholeness, and redemption; but that the gospel operates uniquely to offer hope for these two types of experiences.

We also believe that every person is both a sinner and a sufferer, so both models are necessary in the life of each individual. We hope that what you learn in these materials will deepen your understanding of and appreciation for the gospel in every area of your life.

<b>The Gospel for Sin-Based Struggles</b>	<b>The Gospel for Suffering-Based Struggles</b>
<p><b>STEP 1.</b> ADMIT I have a struggle I cannot overcome without God.</p>	<p><b>STEP 1.</b> PREPARE yourself physically, emotionally, and spiritually to face your suffering.</p>
<p><b>STEP 2.</b> ACKNOWLEDGE the breadth and impact of my sin.</p>	<p><b>STEP 2.</b> ACKNOWLEDGE the specific history and realness of my suffering.</p>
<p><b>STEP 3.</b> UNDERSTAND the origin, motive, and history of my sin.</p>	<p><b>STEP 3.</b> UNDERSTAND the impact of my suffering.</p>
<p><b>STEP 4.</b> REPENT TO GOD for how my sin replaced and misrepresented Him.</p>	<p><b>STEP 4.</b> LEARN MY SUFFERING STORY which I use to make sense of my experience.</p>
<p><b>STEP 5.</b> CONFESS TO THOSE AFFECTED for harm done and seek to make amends.</p>	<p><b>STEP 5.</b> MOURN the wrongness of what happened and receive God’s comfort.</p>
<p><b>STEP 6.</b> RESTRUCTURE MY LIFE to rely on God’s grace and Word to transform my life.</p>	<p><b>STEP 6.</b> LEARN MY GOSPEL STORY by which God gives meaning to my experience.</p>
<p><b>STEP 7.</b> IMPLEMENT the new structure pervasively with humility and flexibility.</p>	<p><b>STEP 7.</b> IDENTIFY GOALS that allow me to combat the impact of my suffering.</p>
<p><b>STEP 8.</b> PERSEVERE in the new life and identity to which God has called me.</p>	<p><b>STEP 8.</b> PERSEVERE in the new life and identity to which God has called me.</p>
<p><b>STEP 9.</b> STEWARD all of my life for God’s glory.</p>	<p><b>STEP 9.</b> STEWARD all of my life for God’s glory.</p>

**To learn more about Summit’s counseling ministry visit  
[www.summitrdu.com/counseling](http://www.summitrdu.com/counseling)**

## Chapter I

### “Starting a Hard Journey on Empty”

PREPARE yourself physically, emotionally, and spiritually to face your suffering.

**“Living in denial about my depression-anxiety would be more costly than anything God would take me through in the quest for hope and peace.**

**God is good for bringing me to the point of acknowledging my depression-anxiety. Therefore, I will put myself in the best physical, emotional, relational, and spiritual position possible to face my emotional struggle.”**

**Memorize:** Matthew 11:28-30 (ESV), “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” As you memorize this passage reflect upon these key points:

- “Come to me... I am gentle” – Hope begins with a relationship with Jesus. He wants you to know he is patient.
- “Labor and heavy laden” – When battling depression everything feels like a heavy laden toil. Jesus gets it.
- “Give you rest... for your soul” – There will be steps to take, but Jesus recognizes first you need rest and hope.
- “Take my yoke” – A yoke tied two oxen to the same plow. Jesus is committing to carry this load with you.
- “Learn from me” – As Jesus walks with you through this valley of despair, you will learn a great deal from him.

#### Teaching Notes

“Certainly one of the biggest mistakes you can make is to try too much at once. You will fail and be even more depressed (p. 84)... As anxiety and panic attacks are also commonly associated with depression (so much so that doctors are increasingly using the term depression-anxiety when referring to depression), much of what I write will apply to these distressing conditions also (p. 1).” David Murray in *Christians Get Depressed Too*

“With all the debate about the causes of depression, it is easy to miss the obvious: depression is painful. It is a form of suffering (p. 37).” Ed Welch in *Depression, A Stubborn Darkness*

“The Psalms treat depression more realistically than many of today's popular books on Christianity and psychology. David and other Psalmists often found themselves deeply depressed for various reasons. They did not, however, apologize for what they were feeling, nor did they confess it as sin. It was a legitimate part of their relationship with God. They interacted with him through the context of their depression (p. 204).” Steve and Robyn Bloem in *Broken Minds*

“Being depressed is bad enough in itself, but being a depressed Christian is worse. And being a depressed Christian in a church full of people who do not understand depression is like a taste of hell (p. 14).” John Lockley in *A Practical Workbook for the Depressed Christian*

“There are usually no quick fixes. For Christians there will often need to be a balance between medicines for the brain, rest for the body, counsel for the mind, and spiritual encouragement for the soul (p. 30)... We will answer the question ‘What is depression?’ by looking at how it is related to and reflected in five areas of our lives: our life situation, our thoughts, our feelings, our bodies, and our behavior (p. 32).” David Murray in *Christians Get Depressed Too*

“[On John 5:6] Doctors and pastors are often faced with the frustrating situation of people who need the help they can give, yet are not taking the steps required to benefit from this help. Perhaps they have just learned to live with the problem. Perhaps they have given up hope of getting better. Perhaps they lack the will to play their part in the healing process. Perhaps they are frightened of all the responsibilities of life that would come upon them should they be viewed as well again. Perhaps they would miss the attention and sympathy that being ill may generate... You have no hope of recovery from depression unless you want to recover and are, therefore, prepared to play your own significant part in the recovery process (p. 69-70).” David Murray in *Christians Get Depressed Too*

“Reading Scripture is a discipline that at times in mental illness is almost impossible and yet remains necessary for spiritual health. Why is this so? Because Scripture bears the saving grace of God (p. 163).” Kathryn Greene-McCreight in *Darkness Is My Only Companion*

### Embedded Study

What is the only thing more overwhelming than being asked to lift an unbearable load? Being asked to move while carrying an unbearable load. That is what many people feel is being asked of them when they begin a journey like this one. When you're emotionally taxed beyond your max, then even the most practical and compassionate advice either feels like it comes from an enemy (someone against you) or a stranger (someone who "just doesn't understand").

There is no way around this obstacle, so let me begin by acknowledging the level of faith and courage represented in your willingness to read these words. To you it may feel like doubt and fear, but your willingness to engage this material is noble and virtuous. I wish, and I'm sure you do too, that we could just rename your depression-anxiety as something positive and it would go away, become a blessing, or become an indicator of some unseen virtue.

Those options do exist. Over the course of this study your depression-anxiety may...

- ... diminish to a point that it does not interfere with your day-to-day life.
- ... become the context for you to learn about God or care for others in new ways.
- ... reveal aspects of your character which you wrongly viewed as meriting shame instead of honor.

But we don't know that now and there is little value in trying to predict in how God will work in your experience at this point in the journey. Likely those things seem far away; as if they belong in a fairy tale. If so, focusing on them will serve as a discouragement rather than an encouragement in the early stages of your journey.

Instead, let's ask a less ambitious questions; not, "Where are we going and what are all the steps and challenges to getting there?" but, "What is the next step and how do I prepare myself to take one step in the direction of hope?" At any moment we can take one step towards hope. If you are already feeling overwhelmed, it may do you little good to think about more than that.

### How Do I Begin?

At the beginning of this journey, God invites you to care for yourself. God does not view you as an employee from whom he wants the maximum return on his investment. Instead, God views you as his child who is hurting and for whom he wants wholeness and hope. Recognizing there will likely be a process of change, rather than just a moment of change, at this stage in the journey God would have you make the necessary preparations for what is ahead.

**Read I Kings 19:1-8.** Elijah was facing the suffering of being persecuted and he was facing it alone (at least to his knowledge). Notice the first thing God does for His discouraged child – God lets him sleep and feeds him (v. 5), then God acknowledged the "journey is too great for you (v. 7)" as a way of encouraging Elijah. No longer did Elijah need to feel like he should be able to do this on his own. No longer did Elijah have to express his thoughts as if God did not understand (as in v. 3-4). By allowing Elijah to prepare physically, God demonstrated He understood Elijah's limits.

**Read Psalm 3:3-5.** In this Psalm David is on the run for his life (v. 1-2). Notice what God does first for His child – God lifts his chin out of shame (v. 3), listens to his cries (v. 4), and gives David sleep (v. 5). David knows he would not sleep at a time like this apart from God's giving him rest. God's involvement was not restricted to the approaching army. God began by preparing His child for what was ahead by giving David sleep.

**Question:** How do you respond when you hear that God wants you to prepare for this journey through depression-anxiety more than He wants you to be productive? Are you able to receive this as a sign of God's love for you?

---



---



---

We want to provide five areas of self-care for you to consider. We have already discussed their spiritual significance – these are things God wants *for* you, not *from* you. As you read them, remember this is not a to-do list for winning God's favor. These are gifts God wants to provide to assist you on your journey.

However, in addition to their spiritual significance, we also want to draw out their physical significance. God designed our bodies to respond to these forms of self-care in a way that is restorative and cleansing; down to the level of our neurotransmitters. Appendix A walks you through how to make a decision about the possible use of psychotropic medication. The efforts we take to describe the biological benefits of each approach below is not meant to preclude the possibility of medication being part of God's care for you.

**Read Proverbs 14:30, 17:22, and Nehemiah 8:10.** Notice the influence of attitudes, relationships, and diet upon the health of the body; particularly as it relates to emotions. The question to ask yourself at this stage is, "Am I placing my mind and brain in the best position to be healthy based upon my life choices?" or "Am I forcing my mind and brain to fight against my life choices and attitude in order to overcome depression-anxiety?" Use the areas of preparation below to help you make this assessment.

## Areas of Preparation

### 1. Sleep

There are two ways in which sleep is an important part of good self-care. The first is that sleep is one of the primary ways that we maintain a rhythm to life. It is hard for life to have any sense of routine if we do not have a regular sleep pattern. If your job requires you to change shifts regularly, this becomes a very important area to manage. Regardless, if you struggle with depression-anxiety, it is highly recommended you develop a consistent sleep pattern.

"One of the keys to a balanced lifestyle is regular routine. This is also one of the first things to fall by the wayside when someone becomes depressed (p. 70)." David Murray in *Christians Get Depressed Too*

The second reason sleep is important for depression-anxiety is that sleep is one of the primary ways that the brain replenishes itself. Sleep does for the brain what exercise does for the body. When we do not get sufficient sleep emotional regulation of any kind, not just related to depression-anxiety, becomes increasingly difficult. If you are not getting, 7-8 hours of sleep each night, then you are making your battle for emotional health more difficult.

If you are having trouble sleeping, consider the following suggestions to help with sleep at this time.

- Believe that sleep is intended as a good gift from God and do not feel guilty for resting.
- Pray that God would give you restful sleep and believe He wants you to have it.
- Memorize a passage of Scripture related to God's care for you and repeat it slowly as you lay down to sleep.
- Play soft music or nature sounds to help prevent your mind from drift-thinking while trying to sleep.
- Reduce the level of caffeine and sugar in your diet, especially after the noon hour.
- Avoid daytime naps so that your sleep is in concentrated blocks; the physiological benefits of sleep are less when we break our sleep into smaller units.
- Establish a bed time routine to help habituate your body towards sleep.
- Take a warm bath to relax your body.
- Try muscle relaxation or stretching exercises about an hour before going to bed.
- Establish a deep slow breathing pattern that simulates sleep breathing.
- Talk with a medical professional about the possibility of a sleep aid.

### 2. Diet

Where does our body get the component parts that comprise our brain chemistry? From our diet. If we recognize how much our diet influences our cholesterol, blood pressure, and energy levels, why don't we equally appreciate its role in our brain chemistry? In the same way that people with a healthy diet may still need blood pressure medicine because of a genetic predisposition towards high blood pressure, a healthy diet may not replace the benefits of psychotropic medications for depression-anxiety. But in both cases, even if medications are utilized, a healthy diet remains vital.

In his book *Leading on Empty*, Wayne Cordiero (p. 133-135) discusses the mood regulating benefits of several dietary changes (material below is a summary of his work).

- Antioxidants combat the effects of free radicals, a primary source of the physiological deterioration caused by depression-anxiety. Antioxidants include beta-carotene, vitamin C, and vitamin E.
- Carbohydrates have been linked to boosts in the neurotransmitter serotonin.
- Protein is known to boost the level of the neurotransmitter dopamine.

Beyond these physiological influences of a healthy diet, what we eat often reveals how much we believe our day-to-day choices matter. When we stop paying attention to what we put in our body or when we begin to just eat-to-survive, it can reveal an “it doesn’t matter what I do, it won’t make a difference” attitude that throws fuel on the fire of our depression-anxiety.

Consider the following suggestions to help with your diet at this time.

- If you’ve lost your appetite, eat several small meals throughout the day instead of three big ones.
- Take a multi-vitamin.
- Consider a Vitamin C booster for your immune system; depression-anxiety is stressful and stress causes the body to pull energy reserves from the immune system.
- Avoid excessive sweets or caffeine. These will impact blood sugar levels and impact your sleep cycle; both of which makes emotional regulation more difficult.
- Eat as many fruits and vegetables as possible; especially if you are prone to over-eat during times of depression-anxiety, make sure what you are eating is helping your emotional cause.

### 3. Exercise

Depression is sedentary. Anxiety is jittery. Exercise, particularly cardiovascular exercise, is good for countering both. Exercise cleanses the body of free radicals generated by depression-anxiety, boosts energy levels, improves sleep, and facilitates a more pro-active attitude towards life.

“One study showed that exercise—three sessions of aerobic activity each week—worked about as well as medication when it came to reducing the symptoms of depression. In addition, research concluded that after one year, people who exercised were much less likely to relapse than people who took medicine... moderate aerobic workouts, done three to five times weekly, cut mild to moderate depression symptoms nearly in half (p. 130).” Wayne Cordiero in *Leading on Empty*

“Moderate physical exercise helps to expel unhelpful chemicals from our system and stimulate the production of helpful chemicals. Outdoor exercise has the added benefit of the sun’s healing rays (p. 71-72).” David Murray in *Christians Get Depressed Too*

What are some steps you can take to increase the physical activity level of your life? If you have health concerns, please consult with your physician before implementing these activities.

---



---



---

### 4. Community

What is the most painful part of depression-anxiety? Each person will have to answer that question for themselves, but one of the leading answers would have to be “the aloneness.” Unfortunately, it is hard for us to admit, “I am depressed” or “I am controlled by fear” to those who care about us.

For too many people, the dysfunctional and unspoken rules of depression-anxiety are:

1. Don’t talk about it.
2. Everything is fine.
3. No one will understand.

It is sad that we use the same logic to isolate ourselves in the experience of depression-anxiety that is commonly used to silence an abused child or a spouse experiencing domestic violence. With our silence about our struggles we become the warden to our cell of isolation.

How do we break through the barrier of our own silence? We speak. What do we say? The following letter is a sample you could write in your own words to a friend. It is meant to be a prompt for conversation with those who already care for you. In it, we include the basic requests you might make of a friend at this stage in your journey.

Friend,

Thank you for the ways you’ve cared for me and valued our friendship. That means more to me than you know. It is because of that trust that I feel like I can tell you something that is hard for me to admit. I struggle with depression-anxiety. That may not seem like a big admission to you, but it is something I have resisted telling anyone for a long time.

The worst part about not telling anyone about my struggle is that I have felt very alone with it. For some reason, I have treated depression-anxiety as if it were a secret about which I should feel ashamed. Because of that I have wondered if people would still like me “if they knew.” The implied answer was always “no, they wouldn’t.”

The main thing I would ask of you is that you do very little different when we’re together. It would be nice if you ask me how I’m doing periodically and show concern for my response (as I trust you would). But the biggest benefit will come from you knowing and still valuing our friendship.

If there are times when I share with you that I am especially down or fearful, it would be great if you would pray for me and find a way to spend some extra time together (i.e., getting lunch, sending a card, offering to do a project together, etc...). I don’t like to ask for those things when I’m down, but they would greatly help me get outside my own thoughts and emotions.

I’m going through a study right now to help me assess how I can best respond to the challenge of depression-anxiety. If you are interested you can look over the study, you can find it at [www.bradhambrick.com/depression](http://www.bradhambrick.com/depression).

It would be nice if I could share with you what I’m learning about myself and my struggle. I like that this study has structure and provides a process for finding hope and relief for depression-anxiety. In the first step it asks me to be more honest with friends, so I can quit believing that these emotions make me a person less worth caring for.

If there are ways I can pray for you, I would be interested to know those as well. Part of the struggle with depression-anxiety is that I think a lot about myself and my experience. Being able to reciprocate by praying for you would be an effective way for me to weaken that emotional habit.

I’m sure I’ll learn a lot as I go through this study, but, for now, I have a lot more hope that I’ll see it through to the end because I’m not doing it alone. It is probably too much to ask that I will never be down or anxious again, but I like the idea of learning how to make those emotional dips more shallow and how to maintain my trust in God during those times.

Thank you caring enough to listen to my burden. Like I said, I don’t want much to change in our relationship. But it is a big relief to allow talking to you to break the silent sense of shame I was living in. That is a great gift you’ve given me already.

How well would those words capture how you would like a conversation like this to begin? What parts would you change?

---

---

---

You will need to make this your own by putting it in your words. As you think about having this conversation with a handful of friends, between two and five, is it intimidating or exhilarating? How different would your day-to-day emotional experience be if you had a few people you could talk to this way?

---

---

---

Who are the people to whom you would send this kind of letter or have this kind of conversation?

---



---

## 5. Priorities

When we are struggling with depression-anxiety there are opposing struggles that emerge: some people struggle with being overcommitted to good-but-not-essential things and feeling like they can't do everything they “should” do; others begin to neglect essential parts of life and allow an insurmountable list of things that genuinely need to be done to accumulate.

Which tendency describes you best? \_\_\_\_\_

If you are over-committed, then realize an important step in overcoming depression-anxiety will involve simplifying your life. You will have to accept that there is no way for you to do everything you're trying to do right now and live an emotionally healthy life. Chances are your depression-anxiety is closely tied to an experience of emotional fatigue and sense of fatalism about whether you will ever be able to please your own conscience.

- Resource: *Burnout: Resting in God's Fairness* is a booklet designed to help you think through how to live with realistic time expectations. A video presentation of this material is available at [www.bradhambrick.com/burnout](http://www.bradhambrick.com/burnout).

You do not have to begin removing things from your life immediately. Chances are that would be overwhelming for you to consider. But begin by answering these questions and allowing the answers to foreshadow the types of changes that are likely coming as you progress through these steps.

- What are the most important priorities that I want to protect in this process?
- What are the things I'm doing simply because “there is no one else to do them”?
- What things in my schedule give me the most life and emotional energy?
- What things in my schedule are the biggest drain and emotional net-loss?
- What are the things I can transition out of immediately, in six weeks, in three months, in six months, or one year?
- Who should I talk to in this decision making process because I value their friendship and input?
- Who should I talk to in this process because they will be affected by the things I decide?

If you are neglecting essential aspects of life, then your response to “priorities” will be different. Your goal will be to identify the most important areas of responsibility towards which you must put whatever emotional energy you have. Depression-anxiety can become a nasty self-fulfilling prophecy: you do not believe you can do what life requires, so you grow passive, key responsibilities are neglected, and the list of things you need to do in order to be “caught up” becomes increasingly overwhelming.

“Busyness is an important part of healing, or at least staving off, the symptoms of depressive disorder (p. 129).”  
Kathryn Greene-McCreight in *Darkness Is My Only Companion*

As you think through this aspect of priorities, allow the following questions to guide you.

- What things did you dismiss as “too idealistic” in the earlier parts of this chapter (i.e., sleep, nutrition, friends)?
- If employed, what priorities do you need to maintain in order to keep your job?
- If you have children, what priorities do you need to maintain to care for your children?
- What aspects of personal hygiene do you need to maintain in order to not reinforce the message you're giving up?
- If you are considering suicide, who do you need to talk to in order to protect the priority of life?

## Sin vs. Suffering

You may be wondering why we're using the Freedom Group 9 Steps for Suffering in this material. Are we trying to say that depression-anxiety is a disease for which we bear no moral responsibility? Are we blaming our social environment for the development of these disruptive emotions?

Maybe. Questions about how to differentiate biological, environmental, and volitional causes for struggles like depression-anxiety are dealt with in a separate resource. You can find that material at [bradhambrick.com/mentalillness](http://bradhambrick.com/mentalillness). These are important questions, and at whatever point in this journey you want guidance on those matters, we would encourage you to access that resource.

However, in this study, we are using the nine steps of suffering because we want to explore how God would care for, guide, and respond to those whose emotions emerge from areas of life for which they do not bear moral responsibility.

In a separate study we will look at the same depression-anxiety struggle using the “Freedom Group 9 Steps for Sin” in which we will explore how God would care for, guide, and respond to those whose emotions emerge from areas of life for which they do bear moral responsibility. Both studies are available at [www.bradhambrick.com/depression](http://www.bradhambrick.com/depression).

Our advice to you is to seek the guidance of a pastor, counselor, or friend about which of these studies you should do first. If you are still uncertain, you could either do them concurrently (doing step one of each before moving to step two of either), or just choose one.

Every believer is simultaneously saint, sinner, and sufferer. Your emotional struggles probably have elements of sin and suffering in them. So you would benefit from learning how the gospel speaks to both sides of the struggle.

### Conclusion

Be encouraged. What you are doing is wise and good. If you are going to engage something that is difficult, then it’s important to know that the endeavor is worthwhile. Learning how God wants to care for and direct you in the experience of depression-anxiety is definitely worthwhile.

At the end of each step we provide a few questions we would like an accountability-encouragement partner to be asking you as you take this journey. This person could be a pastor, counselor, friend, or small group member. Use this as a way to educate those part of your support network about what they can do to help.

#### Encouragement Focus (PREPARE):

With each step, we will provide questions you should invite another person to ask you openly so they can know and encourage you in the process at battling with depression-anxiety.

- Which of the five areas of preparation are you strongest? Weakest?
- What area of preparation seems most important for you to maintain?
- What is something you enjoy doing which I could encourage you to engage with more?

With each step, we advise you to confide at least one new element of your suffering to your encouragement partner.

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

## Chapter 2

### Facing the Pain without Running Away

ACKNOWLEDGE the specific history and realness of my suffering.

**“I will look at my life and acknowledge my emotions as part of my history.  
I will not try to move forward pretending before myself and others that everything is okay.  
I trust that God can and will redeem even my painful, upsetting emotions.  
Evidencing my faith in God I acknowledged my specific history to [names of trusted people].  
This brought great fear [describe] and then relief [describe].”**

**Memorize:** Psalm 44:23-26 (ESV), “Awake! Why are you sleeping, O Lord? Rouse yourself! Do not reject us forever! Why do you hide your face? Why do you forget our affliction and oppression? For our soul is bowed down to the dust; our belly clings to the ground. Rise up; come to our help! Redeem us for the sake of your steadfast love!” As you memorize this passage reflect upon these key points:

- “Psalm” – God inspired these words to be recorded in Scripture because he knew we would need to speak them.
- “Awake!” – The Bible gives voice to a little heresy to show it understands our lives don’t always make sense.
- “Do not reject us” – Even in great emotional pain, the psalmist trusted God with his honest emotions and fears.
- “Our soul is bowed down” – Emotional pain penetrated to the core of the psalmist and he was hungry for hope.
- “Come to our help!” – The hope in this passage is not in the content of its words, but in who it calls upon.

#### Teaching Notes

“Since you might actually enjoy mania (at least when it is not extreme), you might be reluctant to try medication. Talk to wise counselors and your family about this. You might decide to try medication as a way to better love others (p. 23).” Ed Welch in *Bipolar Disorder*

“In anxiety, the person often overestimates the threat or danger they are facing, and at the same time usually underestimates their own capacity to cope with the problem (p. 31).” Chris Williams, Paul Richards, and Ingrid Whitton in *I’m Not Supposed to Feel Like This*

“The present age of anxiety is characterized by pressing concerns about the threat of terrorism, global warming, the beginning of the end of oil, immigration and pluralism, the widening economic gap between those who have and those who have not, and the outsourcing of American jobs. These concerns are legitimate, and they will demand our and our children’s undivided attention for years to come. The anxiety that we feel is compounded daily or, in some cases, hourly by skilled fear entrepreneurs who know how to push our buttons. As if the issues listed here, eliciting legitimate concern and anxiety were not enough, some fear entrepreneurs introduce a host of potentially threatening crises that keep us constantly on edge (p. 17).” Kirk Bingaman in *Treating the New Anxiety*

“Faith, instead of being a help, can sometimes cause extra problems in dealing with depression. There is, for instance, the false guilt associated with the false conclusion that real Christians don’t get depressed. There is also the oft-mistaken tendency to locate the cause of our mental suffering in our spiritual life (p. 5).” David Murray in *Christians Get Depressed Too*

“This can be a painful process of self-discovery. Although we are frail and weak creatures, we like to think that we can cope with everything that life throws at us... Just because we coped with great stresses at some time in our lives does not guarantee that we will cope with lesser stresses at other points in our lives. We age, our hormones and brain chemistry change, and our responsibilities increase as marriage and children come along. Sometimes an adverse reaction to life events will be delayed, even for some years (p. 34).” David Murray in *Christians Get Depressed Too*

“To be human is to be afraid. We are small; the world is big (p. 5).” Ed Welch in *When I Am Afraid*

### Embedded Study

“It’s not that big of a deal. I’ll just press through this. What is a little sadness or anxiety? I can still do my job, pass my tests, take care of my kids, etc... I don’t want people to think I’m weak, weird, needy, ‘have issues’ etc...” These are the kind of thoughts that are often used to minimize or dismiss the experience of depression-anxiety.

Some of these messages may be good and true. Assessing how well you care for your self, family, and responsibilities is important. Often we are “just sad.”

Other messages are purely stigmatizing and lead us to believe that asking for help would make us sub-human or a drain on our friends. These messages will tempt us to “be strong” until we are at “code red” and despair-panic has us firmly in its grip.

Your goals in this chapter are simple – (a) to assess how severe your struggles with depression-anxiety are, (b) to determine the different expressions of depression-anxiety you struggle with, and (c) to identify who you need to ask to come alongside of you in this journey towards hope and peace.

In order to help you in this process, we will provide you with two tools.

1. A Depression-Anxiety Evaluation
2. A Depression-Anxiety Daily Symptom Chart

The evaluation will provide an overview of the various expressions of depression-anxiety you may be experiencing. This information will help you to identify which symptoms it would be beneficial to track on the daily chart. Becoming aware of the various types-frequency-intensity of our emotions will help you gain important aspects of insight to look for in chapters 3-5 and tangibly measure progress by in chapters 6-8.

### Depression-Anxiety Assessment

**Instructions:** Read the following descriptive statements. Mark the answer that best fits how you respond:

**(N) almost never, (R) rarely, (S) sometimes, (F) frequently, or (A) almost always.**

For the most accurate results, ask one person from each major sphere of your life (i.e, home, work, social, church small group, etc...) to complete this survey on your behalf and compare results. If you are willing this is another effective way to begin to enlist those who know and love you to be part of your community of support.

A self-scoring on-line version of this evaluation can be found at: [bradhambrick.com/depression](http://bradhambrick.com/depression).

1. Worry interferes with my job, activities, and social life.	<b>N</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>A</b>
2. When I begin to worry I have a difficult time changing my thoughts and mood.	<b>N</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>A</b>
3. When I begin to worry I reach stress levels that are significantly upsetting.	<b>N</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>A</b>
4. I worry about many different and unrelated things and usually expect the worst.	<b>N</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>A</b>
5. My anxiety has persisted almost daily for at least the last six months.	<b>N</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>A</b>
6. Uncertainty bothers me to the point it is hard to engage with daily activities.	<b>N</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>A</b>
7. I avoid important tasks or relationships because of a pervasive sense of worry.	<b>N</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>A</b>
8. My level of anxiety frequently results in body tension and / or headaches.	<b>N</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>A</b>
9. My level of anxiety frequently results in stomach problems, nausea, or diarrhea.	<b>N</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>A</b>
10. I have difficulty focusing or concentrating on others once I begin to worry.	<b>N</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>A</b>
11. My sense of down mood is generally proportional to negative life events.	<b>N</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>A</b>
12. My sense of down mood rebounds in a reasonable time frame after negative events.	<b>N</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>A</b>
13. I can adapt to major life transitions within a reasonable time of disoriented mood.	<b>N</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>A</b>
14. My sense of down mood does not cause me to pull away from friends or activities.	<b>N</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>A</b>
15. I can be discouraged about a failure or disappointment without feeling defined by it.	<b>N</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>A</b>

16. I have felt sad or empty most of the day, most every day for weeks.	N	R	S	F	A
17. I have lost the ability to enjoy things I would normally enjoy.	N	R	S	F	A
18. My sleep cycle is significantly disrupted; either over sleeping or insomnia.	N	R	S	F	A
19. When trying to do an activity I either feel fidgety or lethargic most of the time.	N	R	S	F	A
20. I feel tired and exhausted most of the time, even after I've slept.	N	R	S	F	A
21. I feel worthless and guilty even when I cannot identify a particular sin.	N	R	S	F	A
22. My thinking feels cloudy and distracted most of the day.	N	R	S	F	A
23. I have had thoughts of suicide or wishing I was dead.	N	R	S	F	A
24. My friends and family frequently comment that I seem down or not myself.	N	R	S	F	A
25. I notice myself avoiding people because conversation seems like a burden.	N	R	S	F	A
26. When my surroundings are dark and / or cold more than normal I experience a down mood.	N	R	S	F	A
27. I find my mood is considerably influenced by how much I am exposed to sunlight.	N	R	S	F	A
28. My down mood during winter months is not associated with unpleasant holiday associations.	N	R	S	F	A
29. My down mood during winter months is not associated with chronic pain exacerbation.	N	R	S	F	A
30. My down mood has proven to be significantly better during the Spring and Summer seasons.	N	R	S	F	A
31. I can identify a particular object, place, or activity that spikes my anxiety level.	N	R	S	F	A
32. My anxiety rapidly rises when I only think about this person, place, or activity.	N	R	S	F	A
33. I organize my life to ensure I avoid this person, place, or activity.	N	R	S	F	A
34. I recognize my fear of this person, place, or activity is excessive or unrealistic.	N	R	S	F	A
35. Recognizing that my fear is excessive or unrealistic does not diminish my fear.	N	R	S	F	A
36. I experience significant distress before or during meeting new people.	N	R	S	F	A
37. I experience significant distress in the hours and days before a social event.	N	R	S	F	A
38. I usually feel watched or judged when I am in a group of people.	N	R	S	F	A
39. When other people notice or joke with me I feel more than a little embarrassed.	N	R	S	F	A
40. I avoid social engagements to my own professional, emotional, or social detriment.	N	R	S	F	A
41. Sometimes my sense of happiness and hopefulness are excessive to my life circumstances.	N	R	S	F	A
42. I sometimes need very little sleep for days on end but still have elevated energy levels.	N	R	S	F	A
43. My sense of importance-ability sometimes become grandiose; my plans become unattainable.	N	R	S	F	A
44. There are times when I spend money, take risks, have sex, or use drugs erratically.	N	R	S	F	A
45. My speech patterns sometimes become very rapid and / or erratic as my thoughts race.	N	R	S	F	A
46. During an experience of anxiety my heart begins to beat rapidly and I experience chest pain.	N	R	S	F	A
47. During an experience of anxiety I have cold sweats and chills.	N	R	S	F	A
48. During an experience of anxiety I get shortness of breath and can hyperventilate.	N	R	S	F	A
49. During an experience of anxiety I have a sense of impending doom or death.	N	R	S	F	A
50. During an experience of anxiety I lose any sense of control over my thoughts or emotions.	N	R	S	F	A
51. When I remember a stressful event it feels like reliving more than remembering the event.	N	R	S	F	A
52. Things in my environment trigger intense memories of a stressful event.	N	R	S	F	A
53. I experience nightmares or flashbacks involving a particular stressful event.	N	R	S	F	A
54. I am unable to remember important aspects of a stressful event.	N	R	S	F	A
55. After a stressful event, I feel emotionally numb and detached from events or people.	N	R	S	F	A
56. After a stressful event, I have a limited sense of the future (i.e., loss of hope or success).	N	R	S	F	A
57. After a stressful event, I persistently scan my surroundings expecting a problem-threat.	N	R	S	F	A
58. After a stressful event, I notice my anger response is more easily triggered and more intense.	N	R	S	F	A
59. After a stressful event, I find it more difficult to fall or stay asleep.	N	R	S	F	A
60. After a stressful event, I am unable to enjoy things I normally enjoyed.	N	R	S	F	A
61. I have fears I know are irrational but still struggle to accept are untrue.	N	R	S	F	A
62. I obsessively feel dirty, contaminated, rejected by God, or like I may sin publicly.	N	R	S	F	A
63. I have fears rooted in superstition or an irrational “need” for symmetry.	N	R	S	F	A
64. I spend a great deal of time on compulsive habits to alleviate my obsessive fears.	N	R	S	F	A
65. I have begun to organize my day around my obsessive fears and compulsive habits.	N	R	S	F	A
66. I have a constant and nagging fear of losing my salvation.	N	R	S	F	A
67. I have a persistent fear that I have or will commit the unpardonable sin.	N	R	S	F	A
68. I restart my prayers if they are not 100% genuine or I have a bad thought while praying.	N	R	S	F	A
69. The thought of Hell torments me even though I understand and try to accept the gospel.	N	R	S	F	A
70. Even when I seek good pastoral counsel on salvation I cannot find rest.	N	R	S	F	A

71. My depression-anxiety is so great I wonder if life is worth living.	N	R	S	F	A
72. I have begun to think my family and friends would be better off without me.	N	R	S	F	A
73. I have begun to make a plan about how I would end my life.	N	R	S	F	A
74. I fantasize about my suicide plan when my depression-anxiety gets intense.	N	R	S	F	A
75. I have begun to say good-bye to friends and set my "affairs in order."	N	R	S	F	A

**Key to Survey Scoring:** Give yourself one point for an "S" response, two points for an "F" response, and three points for an "A" response. If your total score matches the total number of questions in a given subset, that is an area of concern. If your total score comes close to doubling the total number of questions, it is a significant concern. If your total score more than doubles the total number of questions, it should be considered a life-dominating struggle.

- Questions 1-10: ( Total: \_\_\_\_\_ in 5 questions)

This set of questions describes anxiety-depression in the form of **generalized anxiety**. This is anxiety that has migrated from "a normal upset response to unpleasant events" to "a way of life." With generalized anxiety, peace and contentment have become the exception rather than the "normal" of day-to-day living. You are able to function in daily tasks and relationships, but the presence of anxiety is a consistent emotional drain, energy consumer, and a relational distraction.

- Questions 11-15: ( Total: \_\_\_\_\_ in 5 questions)

This set of questions describes anxiety-depression in the form of **situational depression**. Often a down mood and temporary decrease in interest to enjoyed activities is a healthy and normal response to an adverse circumstance. Simply put, it is frequently okay, even good, to be sad. Situational depression is those seasons of down mood that are proportional, in intensity and duration, to the events that triggered them.

- Questions 16-25: ( Total: \_\_\_\_\_ in 10 questions)

This set of questions describes anxiety-depression in the form of a **major depressive episode**. When the impact of depression begins to disrupt life to a degree that is greater than the triggering event, or there is the absence of a triggering event, it can be called a "major depressive episode." When depression reaches this level of intensity it is unwise to rely upon the mere passing of time for relief. Beginning to assess the belief, behavior, and health issues feeding the depressed mood is the advised course of action; consulting a friend, pastor, counselor, or physician.

- Questions 26-30: ( Total: \_\_\_\_\_ in 5 questions)

This set of questions describes anxiety-depression in the form of a **seasonal affective** struggle. Some people's moods are highly affected by the change of season; most often with depression-anxiety being elevated during the winter months. It is unclear whether this is due to exposure to sunlight, circadian rhythms, or changes in activity level, but consulting a physician for this struggle is wise. Also, confide this in your friends for additional encouragement and support during a time you can anticipate to be particularly difficult.

- Questions 31-35: ( Total: \_\_\_\_\_ in 5 questions)

This set of questions describes anxiety-depression in the form of a **specific phobia**. Sometimes fear can attach intensely to specific things or activities. If the cause of the fear is clearly identifiable, then it is likely to be a symptom of post-traumatic stress. If the fear is less rational, lacking an obvious explanation, then it would be a particular phobia. Confiding in friends and seeking the aid of a counselor is advisable.

- Questions 36-40: (Total: \_\_\_\_\_ in 5 questions)

This set of questions describes anxiety-depression in the form of **social anxiety**. More than being self-conscious, shy, or reticent about public speaking, social anxiety results in managing one's life in order to avoid people and an impaired ability to enjoy life in the presence of strangers. As with other types of anxiety-depression, many different motives may produce this struggle and a wise friend, pastor, or counselor can be helpful in sorting through the source of this fear.

➤ Questions 41-45: (Total: \_\_\_\_\_ in 5 questions)

This set of questions describes anxiety-depression in the form of **mania**. Depression that is interspersed with these types of manic symptoms is referred to as Bipolar – “bi” meaning two and “polar” referring to different ends or “poles” of the emotional spectrum. When this is the case consulting a physician, counselor, and seeking accountability from friends is needed. Manic episodes can, initially, be very pleasant (i.e., creative and energetic) but become destructive. Learning how to manage these mood and energy fluctuations is essential to a healthy life and relationships.

➤ Questions 46-50: (Total: \_\_\_\_\_ in 5 questions)

This set of questions describes anxiety-depression in the form of **panic attacks**. Fear can spike to such a degree that it arrests the cognitive and respiratory systems. During a panic attack these effects can be so severe an individual wonders if he / she is having a heart attack. Panic attacks can be the pinnacle expression of intense generalized anxiety or a symptom of post-traumatic stress. Seeking the assistance of a counselor and physician while allowing friends to encourage you is an effective holistic approach.

➤ Questions 51-60: (Total: \_\_\_\_\_ in 10 questions)

This set of questions describes anxiety-depression in the form of **post-traumatic stress**. Trauma is the result of facing a stressor that is larger than your capacity to cope with at the time you go through it. What is traumatic to a six year old child may not be so for a thirty year old adult. Similarly, what is traumatic in the context of other stressful events might not be so if faced by itself. Trauma changes the way memory imprints, moods regulate, and the significance of otherwise less significant triggers.

➤ Questions 61-65: (Total: \_\_\_\_\_ in 5 questions)

This set of questions describes anxiety-depression in the form of **obsessive-compulsive disorder**. When life becomes marked by irrational fears (obsessions) and repeated rituals to relieve those fears (compulsions) this is referred to as obsessive-compulsive disorder. The individual experiencing this struggle must understand that the obsessive-compulsive pattern is the real problem; not the particular fear. A combination of counseling, medication, and support from friends are important for this struggle.

➤ Questions 66-70: (Total: \_\_\_\_\_ in 5 questions)

This set of questions describes anxiety-depression in the form of **religious scrupulosity**. The experience of OCD has a uniquely religious expression referred to as scrupulosity. In this case the obsessive fears have to do with sin, guilt, and damnation; while the compulsions center on religious practices to feel clean, pure, or acceptable. Similarly, the individual experiencing this struggle must understand that the obsessive-compulsive pattern is the real problem; not the religious fear. A combination of counseling, medication, and support from friends are important for this struggle.

➤ Questions 71-75: (Total: \_\_\_\_\_ in 5 questions)

This set of questions describes anxiety-depression in the form of **suicidal consideration**. The weight of depression-anxiety can begin to feel unbearable. When this happens the “logical” conclusion is to seek relief by ending life. This is not a real solution, and there is hope. But if your depression-anxiety has reached this level, seek counseling help immediately and tell family or friends who will be supportive. If you have a friend in this condition who will not commit to receiving help, then calling 911 to ensure their safety is the next, loving step.

Does alcohol, drug, steroid, or prescription medicine usage ever affect the frequency, intensity, or type of depression-anxiety with which you struggle?

\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No

These are mind-mood altering substances that both directly and indirectly exacerbate the experience of depression-anxiety. If you have a substance abuse problem, then this struggle will have to be overcome before you will find consistent relief from depression-anxiety. Regardless, consuming a depressant, stimulant, or other mind-mood altering substance while trying to gain emotional regulation is counter-productive and inadvisable.

### Depression-Anxiety Daily Symptom Chart

Identifying the types of anxiety-depression with which you struggle is an essential step towards gaining a clear understanding of the intensity and duration of your struggle. It is odd that we are not always accurate in our perception of the frequency and intensity of our struggle.

- We may have intense periodic struggles that we continually brace against so we feel they are “always present.”
- We may have several different anxiety-depression struggles that we lump together and give them a single name.
- We may have adjusted to low-grade, background depression-anxiety struggle that we don’t “count” anymore.
- We may intentionally try to ignore milder symptoms until they arrest our attention in peak moments.

If we are going to be effective in overcoming our experience of anxiety-depression, we will need to be accurate in our assessment of when it occurs and the fluctuation in its intensity. It is an unwise general who goes to war against an adversary he does not know well.

**Inductive Bible Study:** Go to an on-line Bible study tool (for instance biblestudytools.com) and search for passages that include words like “before” and “after.” Notice how much attention the Bible gives to describing when one event occurs in relation to another. Then search for words like “great” and “more” or “less.” Notice how much attention the Bible gives to the intensity of various experiences. Chances are you will not read every passage listed – they are too many – but you should get a sense of how much God cares about the kind of details you are discovering with this exercise.

The tool below is intended to help you track the frequency and intensity of various symptoms of depression-anxiety across a month. The top row demarks one column for each day of the month. Rows along the side give places to track each symptom. If your counselor or friend wants you to track a symptom that is not included a row is provided at the bottom for you to track this.

As you record this information here are several patterns to look for:

- Look for symptoms that cluster together – occur or peak at the same time.
- Look for symptoms that occur before or after a significant event (e.g., tragedy, visit from stressful relative, payday, etc...). When something upsetting or exciting occurs mark the day of the month with a symbol and write what occurred on the back of this page next to that symbol.
- Look for symptoms that occur before or after other symptoms. For instance, what symptoms occur in the days before you experience a panic attack?
- Look for similarities in the pattern of your emotions across weeks or months. This may indicate biological rhythms (e.g. menstrual cycle) or logistical rhythms (e.g., work week, shift work schedule, child custody schedule, etc...).

More will be assessed about the story behind (chapter four of this study) and the motive for (chapter three of personal responsibility counterpart to this suffering study) in latter portions of your study. At this point in the process you are merely trying to become more self-aware of the fluctuations in frequency and intensity of our various depression-anxiety experiences.



## Depression-Anxiety Daily Sypntom Chart

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Month: \_\_\_\_\_

**Instructions:** Track the intensity of your key depression-anxiety symptoms using the scale on the right for each day of the month. On days with significantly more / less severe symptoms record key events or relational changes.

**Example:** None      Mild      Moderate      Severe

3	3	3	3
2	2	2	2
1	1	1	1

Shade cells

Day of Month	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31
Down Mood	3																														
	2																														
	1																														
Worry / Anxious Thoughts	3																														
	2																														
	1																														
Inability to Enjoy Normal Pleasures	3																														
	2																														
	1																														
Difficulty Concentrating	3																														
	2																														
	1																														
Discouragement or Sense of Worthlessness	3																														
	2																														
	1																														
Overwhelmed by Life or Emotions	3																														
	2																														
	1																														
Racing Thoughts or Sense of Panic	3																														
	2																														
	1																														
Numb Towards Life	3																														
	2																														
	1																														
Arranging Life in Unhealthy Ways to Avoid Things	3																														
	2																														
	1																														
Manic Symptoms	3																														
	2																														
	1																														
Obsessive-Compulsive Patterns	3																														
	2																														
	1																														
Traumatic Responses	3																														
	2																														
	1																														
Social Anxiety	0																														
	-1																														
	-2																														
Other:	-3																														
	-4																														
	-5																														

Similar resources available at [www.bradhambrick.com](http://www.bradhambrick.com)

### Conclusion

Take a deep breathe. If you feel overwhelmed, remember there is nothing true now that was not true before you read this chapter. You just know more about yourself and your struggle than you did before. This knowledge does not “add” anything to what is expected of you. You were going to battle with these emotions whether you knew them well or not. Now you can be better equipped for the struggle you were going to face anyway.

Often, the step of “acknowledging the history and realness of your suffering” can create a sense of unrest. Our denial or intentional ignorance provided a false sense of security. We were like children pulling the covers over our head to protect ourselves from the monster in the closet. If our sense of upset were true, then our attempt at self-protection was woefully inadequate.

Now you are being equipped to determine how to best address your experience of depression-anxiety. We may not yet know if your struggle is primarily caused by your body, brain chemistry, environment, choices, beliefs, or values. But we are on our way towards finding out, so that we can garner the best of what God offers – directly through the gospel, His Word and His People; and indirectly through the care of physicians, better life practices, or changes in relationships – in our journey towards hope and peace

#### Encouragement Focus (ACKNOWLEDGE):

With each step, we will provide questions you should invite another person to ask you openly so they can know and encourage you in the process of grieving your loss or pain.

- What are the strongest symptoms of your experience of depression-anxiety?
- What are you learning about the frequency and intensity of your various depression-anxiety symptoms?
- How well are you caring for yourself in the ways advised in chapter one?

With each step, we advise you to confide at least one new element of your depression-anxiety.

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

## Chapter 3.

### "Why Does Depression-Anxiety Hurt So Bad?"

UNDERSTAND the impact of my suffering.

**"I used to fear my facing the reality of my depression-anxiety and would not acknowledge it, so I forced myself to live as if my emotions never happened or didn't matter [describe].**

**I can see how my emotions have affected me [describe].**

**It was wrong to interpret the impact of depression-anxiety as my failing or weakness.**

**God is more gracious than that and I must agree with Him.**

**The impact is starting to make sense and help me see life differently [describe]."**

**Memorize:** Proverbs 18:14 (ESV), "A man's spirit will endure sickness, but a crushed spirit who can bear?" As you memorize this passage reflect upon these key points:

- "Man's spirit" – It is our soul that must endure our physical illnesses. There is the ability to point at what hurts.
- "Endure sickness" – When our pain has a clear cause and location our ability to endure suffering is stronger.
- "But" – A contrast is being made between our responses to physical illnesses as opposed to emotional pain.
- "Crushed spirit" – A crushed spirit – losing a sense of hope – is a more intense experience than being sick.
- "Who can bear?" – When we lose hope, we have lost what motivates us to continue struggling for growth.

#### Teaching Notes

"Your loss of spiritual feelings is not the cause of your depression, but rather the depression has caused a general loss of feeling in all parts of your life, your spiritual life included (p. 81)." David Murray in *Christians Get Depressed Too*

"A child interprets the lack of interest in their lives from a depressed parent as evidence of a lack of support, care, and love. The inability to name what they are feeling and why they are feeling as they do complicates an already complex situation (p. 25)." Robert Albers, William Meller, and Steven Thurber in *Ministry with Persons with Mental Illness and Their Families*

"As the brain is the most complex organ in our body, it is liable to be the most affected of all our organs by the Fall and the divine curse on our bodies (p. 64)." David Murray in *Christians Get Depressed Too*

"When the church is silent to a person in crisis, it can sound remarkably like silence from God (p. 100)." Amy Simpson in *Troubled Minds*

"The result is that the person who is more given to depression than another person before conversion will still have to fight that after conversion (p. 109)." D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones in *Spiritual Depression*

"An additional benefit of having some knowledge about depression is that it will prevent the dangerous and damaging misunderstanding that often leads people, especially Christians, to view medication as a rejection of God and his grace rather than a provision of God and his grace (p. 6)." David Murray in *Christians Get Depressed Too*

"Christians don't understand how physical, psychological, and spiritual realms interrelate because Satan muddies the boundaries. Many of our troubles are caused because we think a problem is spiritual when it is physical we think a problem is physical when it is emotional or spiritual (p. 209-208)." D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones in *The Christian Warfare*

"Don't assume that you understand what someone means by 'depression.' Don't fill in the meaning from your own experience, which may or may not be similar. Instead, listen. Allow the depressed person to fill the word depression with the meaning it has for him or her (p. 117)." Ed Welch in *Blame It on the Brain?*

## Embedded Study

After acknowledging the history and realness of your depressive-anxious experience, you need to understand the impact of these experiences on your life. Unless we understand the impact, we will be forced to "just try to feel better;" which leads us to the trapping question, "How can I change my emotions when they do not respond to my will like my hands and feet do?" Merely trying to feel better reinforces a disposition of helplessness and despair.

But the other rebuttal is, "Looking at the impact will only make me feel worse." This is partially true, and why it is highly recommended you go through this study with a friend, pastor, or counselor. But it is also largely false. Consider the parallel example of debt. Many people in debt fail to itemize and total their debt for fear it will be overwhelming. But that leaves them powerless and with a "haunting ambiguous" sense of how big it must be.

In this chapter we will seek to understand the impact of your depressive-anxious experience in three key areas.

1. Factors that Contribute to Impact
2. Changes in Lifestyle that Add to Impact
3. Impact on Family and Relationships

While difficult, this examination will do several things. First, it will show you where and how you can begin to engage your depressive-anxious experience without trying to artificially "make yourself feel better." The information gathered will be even more important in step seven.

Second, it will de-mystify the experience of anxiety-depression. Often the question, "How did things get this bad?" paralyzes and shames us with bewilderment. No piece of the depressive-anxious experience seems to account for the whole. Looking at the pieces can give you the hope and strength to continue the journey.

Third, it will begin to reveal the unhealthy ways you have made sense of your anxious-depressive experience. This will be the primary focus of step four, but understanding impact is a great way to make the unhealthy "story" we build around our depressive-anxious experience more obvious and, therefore, possible to change.

## Factors that Contribute to Impact

No two experiences of depression-anxiety are the same. This is partly because every person is unique. But the differences in experience go beyond personality and life history. It is not just that each individual who experiences depression-anxiety is unique, which is true, but also that each anxious-depressive experience is itself unique. In this section, we want to examine many of the factors that account for this.

As you assess these factors in your life, avoid two temptations. First, as we've already said, do not allow them to overwhelm you. Nothing you will read is more true because you read it. You are only acknowledging the reality that already existed. Second, do not minimize your experience because someone else's experience may involve more factors. You are equipping yourself or your journey; not racing anyone else in their journey.

1. **Cause of Depression-Anxiety:** There is no one-cause for depression-anxiety. Most of the debates about whether depression-anxiety is caused by a chemical imbalance, bad choices, relational wounds, weak faith, or other factors over simplify the experience. The answer is, "Yes, all of these can cause depression-anxiety." The question is, "Which of these is the leading contributor to your experience?" To help you make this assessment see [www.bradhambrick.com/mentalillness](http://www.bradhambrick.com/mentalillness). The point here is that the type of cause-trigger for your depression-anxiety will contribute to the degree and type of impact it has on your life.

In the resource link above we help you assess the difference between biological, environmental, and volitional causes for depression-anxiety and develop an approach for the wise utilization of medication based upon the leading contributor to your anxious-depressive experience.

**2. Duration of Depression-Anxiety:** We can endure anything for "a little while." But when a little while continues and we are unsure when it will end, we begin to lose hope and this compounds our emotional experience. The longer we struggle with anything, the more we begin to view it as inevitable and embrace it as part of our identity.

"The longer we struggle with a problem, the more likely we are to define ourselves by that problem (divorced, addicted, depressed, co-dependent, ADD). We come to believe that our problem is who we are. But while these labels may describe particular ways we struggle as sinners [or sufferers] in a fallen world, they are not our identity! If we allow them to define us, we will live trapped within their boundaries. This is no way for a child of God to live (p. 260)!" Paul Tripp in *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hand*

**3. Number of Occurrences of Depression-Anxiety:** A struggle can be "long" by virtue of its duration or its repetition. "Not again" can be as painful as "How much longer?" When your experience of depression-anxiety returns after seasons of relative dormancy, you can begin to feel like "times of peace" are merely "seasons of waiting" for pain to return. When the return of depression-anxiety is unpredictable, the recurrence impact factor is even greater. It can be hard to rely on God's grace as new each morning (Lamentations 3:21-26) when you are relying upon that grace for a struggle you've already faced.

**4. Number of Attempts to Overcome Depression-Anxiety:** More difficult than mere recurrence is having to re-fight a battle you believed you had already won... or, at least, withstood. It feels like being required to retake a class you thought you passed, but found out a semester later you failed on a technicality. It feels like being required to pay a bill twice because the clerk wasn't paying attention the first time. When depression-anxiety recurs after we thought we had overcome, it takes away any sense of "final-ultimate victory" over this experience. We begin to fear depression-anxiety's fiercest forms in its milder expressions; as if every thunderstorm was going to have hurricane level impact.

**5. Reaction of Friends and Family:** Many people are uncomfortable with the unpleasant emotions of others. If they do not know what to say or do to "make things better," they avoid the person who makes them uncomfortable. Other people do not understand that depression-anxiety can often be a persistent, recurring struggle, so they get upset with the person they perceive as "attention hungry." If you have lost friends or have strained relationships because of these dynamics, this adds to the impact of your suffering.

"Friendship is very important for those with poor mental health, but it is very hard to be a true friend to someone in such a condition (p. 33)." Kathryn Greene-McCreight in *Darkness Is My Only Companion*

"[Testimony] The most profound sentence uttered by my spiritual director, when I was in the midst of my depression, was, 'I am not afraid of your despair!...' It is uncomfortable for many caregivers to enter the dark night of the soul with those who traverse the path of despair. [Advice] Walk with the despairing person and listen, rather than attempting through words to coerce the person to walk a different path (p. 26)." Robert Albers, William Meller, and Steven Thurber in *Ministry with Persons with Mental Illness and Their Families*

**6. Losses Associated with Depression-Anxiety:** You can lose more than relationships. We can lose confidence, jobs, money, opportunities, and many other things. When this happens the experience of grief – denial, anger, sadness, and identity confusion – can be added to the experience of depression-anxiety.

**7. Interpretation of Depression-Anxiety Experience:** The content of these interpretations will be the focus of chapters four and six. But you will be more equipped to resist the content of unhealthy interpretations of your depressive-anxious experience if you are able to identify the common patterns they take. In his book *Christians Get Depressed Too* David Murray addresses nine unhealthy thinking patterns (pg. 36-43, bold text only).

- a. **False Extremes** – Various forms of all-or-nothing, black or white thinking.
- b. **False Generalizations** – Assuming an unpleasant experience will become the new normal for life.
- c. **False Filters** – Ignoring, "filtering out," any positive experience that does not fit with our down mood.
- d. **False Transformations** – Changing our perspective on positive experiences to make them seem bad.
- e. **False Mind Reading** – Assuming negative opinions about ourselves in the minds and mouths of others.

- f. **False Fortune-Telling** – Living as if our negative expectations of the future are true.
- g. **False Feeling-Based Reasoning** – Treating your negative feelings and assessments as if they were facts.
- h. **False “Should’s”** – Giving moral weight to expectations that are either unrealistic or not moral matters.
- i. **False Responsibility** – Taking responsibility for events or other people over which you have no control.

**Read Philippians 4:8-9.** As you look at the kinds of thinking Paul says we must discipline our mind to engage, do not think of this list as “types of content.” Yes, Paul is addressing the content of our thinking. But following his instruction will also correct the “pattern of our thinking.” The nine patterns above are corrected as we follow Paul’s instruction. Also notice that Paul talks about living these things out in community (v. 9). The most effective way to learn these new patterns is to associate with people who think this way and imitate their life (e.g., 1 Corinthians 11:1).

### Changes in Lifestyle that Add to Impact

Depression-anxiety is not an awkward house guest who stays for a few hours and then goes home. You quickly begin to realize that depression-anxiety wants to live with you. It begins to arrange the structures of your life as if it “owned the place.” It is moving furniture, hanging pictures, and putting its favorite foods in your refrigerator. Unless you are willing to de-accommodate these changes, depression-anxiety will remain in your home as long as you allow (passivity towards these changes is permission).

We will examine six ways depression-anxiety makes itself at home in your life.

1. **Unhealthy Lifestyle Accommodations:** Withdrawal from friends, erratic sleeping patterns, eating for comfort rather than nutrition, avoiding things that feel like “too much work,” neglecting interests that usually energize you, and similar changes make your life a hospitable home for depression-anxiety. If you leave your door open and have a big bowl of mixed nuts in your living room, don’t be surprised if you’re living with squirrels. If you allow these changes to persist, don’t be surprised if you’re living with depression-anxiety.
2. **Changes in Role or Identity:** Being anxious-depressed can change the way we see ourselves, and, thereby, how we relate to other people. We can begin to take on pejorative titles like “sick,” “crazy,” or “broken.” These become sources of shame or entitlement; we begin to hide or expect things from others in a way that creates an imbalance that is un conducive for healthy relationships. The result is that healthy friendships grow distant and we are left with enabling or shaming friendships that feed our depression-anxiety.
3. **Living in Response to Emotions:** We begin to measure our day on the basis of a single variable – how do I feel? Further we begin to make choices on the basis of a single variable – will this make me feel better... quickly? When this happens our mood begins to dominate our thinking and cloud our decision making. No longer are we considering what a “full life” would be; instead we begin to live for relief. Whether we are abusing a substance or not, we are beginning to think like an addict.
4. **Loss of Hope for Change:** A primary measure of the severity of depression-anxiety can be revealed by the question, “How much hope do you have that things can be better?” The fading of hope is the measure of severity. Hope is the difference between a challenging season of life and experiencing depression-anxiety. Hope does not make us immune to unpleasant emotions, but it does buffer us against despair. If you want to know the difference between “normal sadness and worry” and significant depression-anxiety, it is when hope begins to fade.
5. **Passivity Towards Change:** “It doesn’t matter what I do, so I might as well do nothing,” is the cynical response to the loss of hope. Passivity is the behavioral expression of the absence of hope. The result is an atrophy of the will. In the same way that physical passivity results in muscle atrophy, growing passive towards the things that upset you results in an atrophy of the will.
6. **Loss of a Sense of Time:** In the absence of goals and short-term memory loss (common features of depression-anxiety), the loss of a sense of time. The longing for what is “next” is key to our sense of time and memory. When we surrender our ambition and hope to depression-anxiety we forfeit what connects tomorrow to today and allows “this task” to take on meaning as it contributes to something “we want and believe is possible.” The result is that every moment begins to float in an abyss of meaninglessness.

**Read Lamentations 3:1-48.** Often when we think of this passage we start with the "happy part" that begins in verse 21. Take your time and walk with Jeremiah, the author of Lamentations, as he traces the challenges which create a great sense of felt-need to cling to hope (v. 1-20). Note how much detail Scripture gives to "understanding the impact of his suffering." Now read the way that Jeremiah fought to take every thought captive (2 Corinthians 10:5) in the second half of this chapter. Allow this to both dispel any sense of whining you may feel as you seek to understand the impact of your suffering, and to strengthen the notion that God intends to care for people with hard emotional battles like yours through his Word.

### Impact on Family and Relationships

The first two areas of impact we examined were how the experience of depression-anxiety impacts you. Now we are going to examine how your experience of depression-anxiety impacts those around you. You happen to those around you as much as they happen to you. Overcoming depression-anxiety will have social implications and it is good for us to begin considering those now.

This is a point where it is easy for many people to lapse into self-pity and shame. But considering how your emotions impact others is vital to godly change. The best response is effort towards progress rather than an emotional apology. If confession is needed, that will be covered in step five of the sin-based counterpart to this study. For now your objective remains to understand the impact of your depression-anxiety so that you can be equipped to battle it most effectively.

In her book *Troubled Minds: Mental Illness and the Church's Mission*, Amy Simpson lists twelve ways that family and friend are affected when their loved one experiences significant mental illness (p. 60-80; bold text only). As you read these, ask yourself two questions: (1) when may these be present in my relationships, and (2) how can I minimize their effect? But do not allow these to distract you from your pursuit of hope and peace; which is the best thing you can do for those who care about you.

1. **Special Rules:** When one person does less others must do more or suffer the consequences. When one person becomes emotionally fragile those around him/her learn the "rules" to keep things "normal." Whenever certain subjects or activities become "off limits" they become life rules people must follow to stay in good relationship. When some things are "not public knowledge" this creates an artificial social system. All of these are ways that depression-anxiety can create special rules for those around you.
2. **Resource Monopoly:** Therapy, medication, hospitalization, and missed work all cost money, time, and attention. They may be a very good investment, but they still consume resources. Other family members will do without certain things because of this investment. If you are a parent, the most costly of these resources is attention. Make sure you set aside time to invest your attention in your children. It will bless you and is vital to their healthy development.
3. **Confusion:** With depression-anxiety there are no bruises, scars, or broken bones; there is not a rash, skin discoloration, or bumps. There is nothing that makes it obvious that something is wrong. This is as confusing to others as it is frustrating to you. Children are especially prone to self-incriminating interpretations of your down mood as being their fault; they need something that "makes sense" of what is occurring in their world. You can love others well by listening for and patiently correcting their confused guilt-interpretations of your emotions.
4. **Anxiety:** Confusion (previous point) breeds anxiety. This is true for you. If you do not understand what causes your emotional fluctuations that feels unpredictable and stressful. Alleviating this stress is the reason for the amount of assessment work you're asked to do in this study. The same is true for your family and friends. When you can tell they are confused by your mood changes, acknowledge that you are confused as well. This can let them know they are not "missing something" that is obvious to you and should be to them.
5. **Guilt:** The quickest way to control and make sense of something emotional is to take responsibility for it (whether it is accurate or healthy or not). The answer to the question, "What can I do to help?" can easily be misconstrued as an answer for the question, "What should I be doing so you would not feel this way?" The former seeks to provide support and gives grace; the latter assumes responsibility and assumes guilt. When this mistake is made it makes your

unpleasant mood a tarnish on their clean conscience. Your sadness is perceived as their deficiency. Saying, “You haven’t done anything to make me feel this way,” can be important.

6. **Maladjustment:** This is particularly true for children. When mom or dad is more internally focused on themselves than externally focused on their children, the children have to adjust to this culture change. It will be the “normal” that they know and from which they form their relational instincts. Spouses also adjust as they accommodate their social and home expectations to the possibilities allowed and environment created by their spouse’s emotions. The best way to account for this factor is to fully engage with pursuit of healthy emotions and demonstrate awareness of when your mood is affecting others in an unhealthy way.
7. **Role Reversal:** Children can become caregivers or emotional supporters, spouses can become parents, and friendships can become one-way relationships when depression-anxiety dominates our life. These reverse what is healthy for each of these relationships. Resist this most intensely with your children. Kids should be allowed to be kids and not asked to carry the emotional load of their parents. With spouse or friends, overtly acknowledge if there is a role change, which can be helpful, but also keep them informed of the steps you are taking to make this arrangement short-term. Allowing these role reversals to become long-term is what accounts for the “special rules” described in the first item on this list.
8. **Instability:** When your emotions change the plans of others you introduce instability into their lives. They become less able to prepare for future events and implement reliable patterns for managing basic life tasks and interests. Beyond sensitivity to others, you begin to teach them that your emotions are the top priority and final arbiter of schedules and decisions. Following through on commitments is not just about preventing the passivity that is hospitable for depression-anxiety, but also about loving others well by limiting the instability in their lives.
9. **Medications:** How to make wise decisions about the use of medication is covered in Appendix A. But, as you likely know, finding the “right” medication is hard. How to identify which medication will be most effective for a given individual’s depression-anxiety can be difficult. In this effort, family and friends’ view of medication and doctors can be affected. Some may grow cynical when results are not as immediate. Others may grow overly-reliant on the role of doctors-medicine for healthy emotions. The resource [www.bradhambrick.com/mentalillness](http://www.bradhambrick.com/mentalillness) is intended to balance these expectations.
10. **Grief and Loss:** People who love you will experience sorrow as you struggle. This is right and good (Romans 12:15). It can feel awkward or guilt-provoking when your emotions have this kind of influence on others. But when you see this influence simply say, “Thank you... Thank you for caring about me enough that what happens in my life impacts you. I want you to know that my emotions are not your responsibility, but it is comforting to know that I am not alone in this experience.” Affirm their character while releasing their sense of responsibility.
11. **Shame:** Unfortunately, there is still a social stigma associated with depression-anxiety. It can make other’s knowledge of what you’re experiencing feel like a secret. Secrets create a sense of separation and, with that separation, shame. We face a cultural battle to corporately understand depression-anxiety better so that this stigma can be removed. The removal of every stigma happens when courageous individuals will talk openly about their experience and use it to educate others. This seminar is intended to help you, and thereby strengthen the entire church, in this process.
12. **Spiritual Crisis:** Depression-anxiety generates many God-questions; for you and those who love you. We will explore these in great detail in chapters four through six. Share what you learn with those who love you. This will help reinforce what you are learning and help them process the corresponding questions they are also asking.

**Read I Samuel 1:3-8.** It might be easy to conclude from this section that family and friends are innocent by-standers affected by your emotions. That is not always true. Often our “support network” can be less than helpful. Look at the example of Elkannah (v. 8). His “support” revealed that he clearly did not understand. Hannah’s sorrow made him uncomfortable and he wanted her to feel better. But God would have to comfort Hannah in spite of his words instead of through them. Part of the comfort we take from Scripture is the examples of how God was faithful even when his people were clumsy with one another.

**Read Galatians 6:1-5.** Notice the different ways that God describes how relationships should work when one person needs other to bear their burdens. First, notice that you should go to those who are more mature in their faith (v. 1a). Second, notice that these individuals are instructed to know their own limits (v. 1b). Third, notice how you are providing them an opportunity to fulfill the law of Christ (v. 2). Fourth, notice that even those who are spiritually mature are prone to the same struggles (v. 3). Finally, notice that, while this person comes alongside you for encouragement, each of you maintain responsibility for your own lives and struggles (v. 5).

### Conclusion

Are you starting to understand your experience of depression-anxiety better? Even if it is a little intimidating, that is a reason for encouragement. If you understand more and are sharing with healthy people, that is significant progress. It may or may not yet be providing the level of relief you desire, but like children learning their letters as a first step towards reading, it is progress.

The most important things for you to do at this stage in the journey are to persevere and involve healthy people. Quitting and isolation are the primary dangers to avoid. In steps four through six, we will begin to take the insight you’ve gathered in the early stages of this journey and apply it to the cognitive-narrative aspect of your depression-anxiety struggle. Then in steps seven and eight we will look at the behavioral-logistical changes you can make to help alleviate your suffering.

Use the questions below to help assimilate what you’ve learned about your experience and yourself in this chapter by talking it through with members of your support network.

#### Encouragement Focus (UNDERSTAND):

With each step, we will provide questions you should invite another person to ask you openly so they can know and encourage you in the process of grieving your loss or pain.

- What are the leading factors that have contributed to your experience of depression-anxiety?
- How has your lifestyle begun to make it easier to remain in a depressed-anxious mood?
- What impact is your depression-anxiety having on your family and friends? How can you offset this?
- How well are you caring for yourself in the ways advised in chapter one?

With each step, we advise you to confide at least one new element of your suffering to your encouragement partner.

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

## Chapter 4.

### “I Can Feel My Depression-Anxiety Becoming ‘Who I Am’”

LEARN MY SUFFERING STORY which I use to make sense of my experience.

**“I formed beliefs [define] about myself, life, and God based on my depression-anxiety.**

**I lived out of those beliefs [describe] because they were all I knew and they ‘fit.’**

**Those beliefs became the guiding themes of my life story.**

**Putting those beliefs into words scares me [describe why].**

**I reject that false life story and am committed to learning how my life fits into God’s great story of redemption.”**

**Memorize:** Psalm 88:13-18 (ESV), “But I, O Lord, cry to you; in the morning my prayer comes before you. O Lord, why do you cast my soul away? Why do you hide your face from me? Afflicted and close to death from my youth up, I suffer your terrors; I am helpless. Your wrath has swept over me; your dreadful assaults destroy me. They surround me like a flood all day long; they close in on me together. You have caused my beloved and my friend to shun me; my companions have become darkness.” As you memorize this passage reflect upon these key points:

- Psalm 88 – This is the darkest of all the psalms. God knew we would need words like this and he gives them to us.
- “I cry to you” – It was not for lack of prayer or faith that the psalmist was experiencing deep despair.
- “From my youth up” – Whether this was factually accurate or not, this a sense of abandonment was strong.
- “Surround me like a flood” – This person felt like they were drowning in their emotions which were getting worse.
- “Companions have become darkness” – There was a looming sense that no one did or even could understand.

#### Teaching Notes

“From a theological perspective, the most dangerous thing about mental illness is that it can lock us in ourselves, convincing us that we are indeed our own, and completely on our own, isolated in our distress (p. 116)... Ultimately, though, I think the despair of mental illness itself has no meaning... Mental illness is the lack of meaning, just as evil is the lack or privation of good (p. 110-111).” Kathryn Greene-McCreight in *Darkness Is My Only Companion*

“To begin the process of learning how to be a happier person, we must see the deception of our internal storyline and replace it with the truth (p. 32)... It’s interesting how our internal beliefs shape what we ‘see’ and don’t ‘see’ (p. 100).” Leslie Vernick in *Lord, I Just Want to Be Happy*

“Meaning-making is at the heart of human experience... Narrative theory assumes that people make meaning in their lives through stories—in other words, we provide narrative links between events in our lives (storying them) in order to make sense of them... Yet only a small percentage of our life experiences get storied. Most get lost or obscured by the more dominant storylines of our lives... Nonproductive anxiety is generated when the meaning we make out of the events in our lives creates a sense of threat inherent in our future... Other, nonthreatening storylines have been obscured by the anxiety story line... People who struggle with various kinds of troubling anxiety tend to make meaning along the storyline that predicts more trouble, a loss of control, or grave risk (p. 49-50).” Robert Albers, William Meller, and Steven Thurber in *Ministry with Persons with Mental Illness and Their Families*

“If I imagine the worst, I will be more prepared for it. Worry is looking for control... Going one step further to track this message back to its origins, there is an entire worldview implicit in some worry. It cries out about an ultimate aloneness. There is no one who can really help. No one can rescue. No one is really looking out for you. You are an orphan in a chaotic universe that operates according to chance. Who wouldn’t be worried given such a view of reality (p. 53)?... When we don’t know the true God, we assume that he is like ourselves, which is a terrifying thought (p. 103).” Ed Welch in *Running Scared*

“One of the most common tendencies for those with depression is to focus on feelings and to base beliefs and conclusions on these feelings... We should encourage the depressed person to move away from the realm of the subjective and to instead take on the objective truths of Christianity, things that are true regardless of our feelings: justification, adoption, the atonement, the attributes of God, and heaven, for example (p. 97).” David Murray in *Christians Get Depressed Too*

### Embedded Study

This may be the darkest step in your journey. It will be where your fears find words and they move from being a haunting echo in your emotions to overt statements that feel more true than they are. You will be asked to question what is real so that you can embrace what is true and find the freedom this brings.

Imagine the child who is afraid of learning to swim. Each time she is carried near the water she clinches her parent’s neck with all her might. Her fear is real. We need not assign the motive of being a “drama queen” or that she is faking for attention. But her fear is not true. The emotion is built upon a false story of drowning. Believing this story both locks her in fear and prevents her from knowing the joy of swimming.

We want you to be able to read this chapter with the tone of a compassionate parent helping this young girl overcome her fear of learning to swim. We want to honor your emotions of anxiety-depression without affirming the destructive, untrue narratives that undergird them.

This process will not un-script the facts you detailed in step two or the impact you discovered in chapter three. The young girl could make many factual statements that seemingly affirm her false story, “I do not know how to swim. You want me to get in water deeper than I am tall. People who don’t know how to swim drown in water over their head.”

These facts get several things wrong – the character of the parent, the presence of the parent, the ability of the girl to learn, the level of danger of the pool, and how much fun swimming will be. But we can all sympathize with how easily the realness of our emotions interfere with these kinds of truths about God, ourselves, and our circumstances.

To help you complete this step we will break this chapter into two parts:

1. What Does My Depression-Anxiety Say? 10 Potential Themes
2. From Facts to Themes to Story

In the first section we will look at common themes that emerge to make sense of your experience of depression-anxiety. These themes may be applied to you, God, or your circumstances. Before you explore these themes, try to put into words the misconceptions or exaggerations you tend to believe about each.

- Yourself: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- God: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Circumstances: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### What Does My Depression-Anxiety Say?

This awkward question forces us to examine the message we are embracing in the midst of our emotional experience. As you read through the list below, you are trying to identify which messages best capture your experience. Do not feel compelled to think that your emotions are saying all of these things.

At the end of each theme a passage of Scripture will be provided with a devotional guide. These are not meant to be “the answer” which erases your experience of depression-anxiety or dominates the suffering story into remission. They are meant to offer hope and prevent this chapter from seeming as dark as it would otherwise.

Nine of the ten themes / statements are taken from Ed Welch’s article “Words of Hope for Those Who Struggle with Depression” (*The Journal of Biblical Counseling*; Winter 2000, p. 43-44; bold text only). As you read this section, simply be asking yourself the question, “Which of these sounds like me?”

1. **“I am guilty or ashamed.”** The theme of guilt would view depression-anxiety as sin and say, *“This is my fault.”* While the theme of shame would view depression-anxiety as suffering and say, *“Something is wrong with me.”* Either way, the emotions of depression-anxiety would become the defining quality in your sense of identity.

The tempting part of guilt for these emotions is that it provides a façade of immediate emotional control. If this were true, then repentance would provide relief. It would be a great trade to “own” our emotions and be delivered. But even when depression-anxiety does reveal sin, the emotions themselves are not what is sinful; only the values and lifestyle that produce them. So this “deal with God” mentality is not the answer.

The tempting part of shame for these emotions is that it means we can quit looking for an explanation. Often shame is the result of exhaustion. We can’t think of anything else to do and no longer have the energy to do it if we did, so we give up and embrace shame as a form of painful-rest. But the result is passivity and isolation; both of which only stoke the fire of anxiety-depression.

How or when has your depression-anxiety said, “I am guilty or ashamed”?

---



---



---

**Read Ezekiel 36:25-31.** Notice that when God promises to wash his people clean he says he will wash them of their idolatry and uncleanness. This removes both guilt and shame. Idolatry creates guilt because it relies on something other than God for the things only God can do. Uncleanness is different. Under Old Testament law you could become unclean by having a skin disease, touching or eating the wrong animal, or violating some other ceremonial law. These were not “wrong” (many were unhealthy and needed to be discouraged) but they became sources of shame. God offers a full cleansing from both guilt and shame. Notice the extent to which God goes to ensure his people that he will restore them to full, right relationship with him.

2. **“I am afraid.”** Fear is initially invigorating and then draining; it spikes, then crashes. This helps explain why depression-anxiety are almost inevitably correlated. Whichever comes first, it is physically and emotionally probable the other will follow. If we are anxious first, we cannot sustain this emotionally heightened state and will physically crash into depression. If we are depressed first, things will be neglected and occasionally be jolted into fear-action by the crisis of things that must be done.

Understanding this dynamic still misses the question, “Of what are you afraid?” Is it a physical threat of safety, an emotional threat of security, a hypothetical threat of the unknown, or a perceived threat of the imagined? Each of these calls for a different response to counter or remove the story line. Articulating the thing(s) that you fear allows you to identify the aspects of God’s character you need to trust more or the areas of God’s guidance you need to follow.

Imagine the “unsafe music” that plays behind a scary movie scene; the music that plays when a shark is approaching in the movie *Jaws* or an axe murderer is stalking someone in a horror film. Allowing the theme of danger to dominate your life, is like constantly playing emotional music in your day-to-day life. Even a comedy or romance movie would be disturbing with that music. You wouldn’t be able to enjoy it, even if the content were funny or heart-warming. The same is true of pleasant events in our life set against a background theme of danger.

How or when has your depression-anxiety said, “I am in danger”?

---



---



---

**Read Psalm 91.** Notice that the psalmist does not dismiss the dangers around him. It is not as if these elements of the story disappear. There are still snares (v. 3), deadly pestilence (v. 3), the terror of night (v. 5), pressures of the day (v. 6), perishing of people (v. 7), wicked people in the world (v. 8) and natural dangers (v. 13). Faith does not require the psalmist to be blind to these realities. Instead, as you read the psalm, you will simply notice that God’s presence and care have become larger themes in his story than these dangers.

3. **“I need something.”** Often depression is not about what is pending (i.e., fear or dread) but what is missing (i.e., loneliness or emptiness). The blessing of living in a first-world country is that we have the opportunity (i.e., freedom, time, and resources) to pursue fulfillment. The danger is that when we do, be, or have anything, nothing ever feels like “enough.” Endless possibilities make reality seem sub-optimal.

In a “land of opportunity,” contentment begins to feel like “settling;” being dominated by longing becomes a virtue. Whether the sub-theme is romance or achievement, a sense of need blinds us to the goodness of God in this moment because of the ways God has been good to others in different ways. We are often like children who cannot enjoy our Happy Meal toy because our sibling got a different one, and (as we tell the story to ourselves) “different” means “more awesome than mine.”

What is it that you believe you need to be at peace or to have hope? The wording of this question is not meant to provoke guilt but to slow down our emotional logic which tends to validate itself very quickly. As you compile this list, look for examples of people who live fulfilled lives in comparable circumstances to your own. Allow this to reframe your pursuit of the blessings you desire.

How or when has your depression-anxiety said, “I am lacking something essential or unwanted”?

---



---



---

**Read I Corinthians 12:4-26.** Do not apply what is about to be said about this text to dangerous situations. But notice that God intentionally blesses his people differently. One implication of this passage is that God gives many things we need to other people to force us to live in community and overcome the sense that we must “own” everything that makes us feel safe, wanted, and fulfilled. Part of living at peace in God’s story is realizing the relationship this facilitates is better than the isolation self-autonomy would produce.

4. **“I must avoid something.”** On the other side of need is avoidance; this is the opposite of the previous theme. We can crave acceptance or live to avoid rejection; crave success or live to avoid failure. Often these dualities exist within the same person. But either theme, craving or avoiding, are equally effective at producing a life marked by depression-anxiety.

When you live to avoid something, you can only know failure or suspense but never success or rest. A better recipe for anxiety-depression could not be written. When your goal is to avoid something, you only have a measure for failure; success is vague-undefined-idealistic. Your best moments are tainted as you brace against the possibility of your worst moments.

The result of this theme is that all of life becomes dangerous. We live guessing where our feared-danger is going to pop up next; like a not-fun version of the Whack-a-Mole arcade game. Hyper-vigilance is the name for this style of thinking. “Vigilant” means to be watchful or alert. “Hyper” means this tendency has become heightened. This pattern of thinking is one way we reinforce narrative that our life is unsafe.

How or when has your depression-anxiety said, “I am must avoid something”?

---



---



---

**Read Psalm 23.** This psalm can be so familiar that we miss the story it contains. God, as the Good Shepherd, is walking with the author through many things he would prefer to avoid. Green pastures and still waters may sound nice, but they are exposed places where predators would be stalking (v. 2). The valley of the shadow of death is an obvious place we would want to avoid (v. 4). Being in the presence of enemies is also something we tend to avoid (v. 6). Notice how God re-stories these experiences with his presence in this psalm.

5. **“I lost something.”** This is a third facet of painful longing. We’ve discussed craving and avoiding; now we’ll look at how both grief and regret create a hospitable storyline for anxiety-depression. In this situation, we’ve had what we are desiring, but now it is gone. Whether we believe we are responsible for the loss (regret) or not (grief), the end result is that we believe our past is better than our future.

In this story, “the good life” is what we had. “Good” has become frozen in time. Nostalgia has become the counterfeit for dreaming of a satisfying future. The result is that every blessing in the moment is emotionally measured as being “less than” what was lost.

Often this can occur after a very satisfying season of life; parents who enjoy when the “kids were little,” the athlete who misses his “playing days,” or missing a circle of friends when the next season of life changes one’s relationships. Life is filled with these transitions even without the contributions of death or sin.

How or when has your depression-anxiety said, “I am grieving the absence of someone or something”?

---



---

**Read Philippians 1:7-8.** Notice that Paul deeply yearned for his friends (v. 8). While he was happy for them (v. 3-4), this had to create a sense of stress and sadness (II Corinthians 11:28). Notice what Paul says about these emotions, “It is right for me to feel this way (v. 7).” Paul was able to miss his friends and the season of life they shared together without giving way to persistent depression-anxiety because this experience of longing was within the larger redemptive narrative of the gospel (Philippians 4:10-13).

6. **“I am angry.”** Injustice or perceived injustice often fuel anxiety-depression. Anger says two things, “This is wrong and it matters.” A healthy response to these situations is to assess whether the injustice is real and, if so, allow the energy of anger to motivate us towards a healthy solution. However, for various reasons, we become passive towards the injustice and the energy of anger either sends us spinning (anxiety) or implodes (depression).

In either case, the story of this kind of depression-anxiety becomes, “I am powerless about something that is wrong and important.” Passive anger creates an emotional black hole; there is a great deal of emotional energy being sucked into nothingness. Instead of fueling action, the anger begins to fuel hopelessness.

Many times Christians get caught in this pattern because they believe anger is inherently wrong. Victims of abuse or neglect often get caught in this pattern because they’ve been conditioned to believe that injustice always wins and/or intimidated out of taking appropriate actions. Either way, talking to someone you trust is an important step in letting go of this toxic passive-anger.

How or when has your depression-anxiety said, “I have been wronged and I can’t find justice”?

---



---

**Read James 5:1-6.** This may seem like an odd passage; likely you double-checked the reference. Realize that the offenders James was referring to were not a part of the church. James was writing to the oppressed, refugees Christians displaced by persecution in Jerusalem (James 1:1) who were seeking employment in this system. James was pastoring them in how to be healthily angry so that they would not become despairing. Consider how much of the Bible is written to God’s people suffering persecution. God knows we must put these experiences into words and incorporate them into a redemptive narrative or the result will be emotional turmoil.

7. **“Woe is me.”** Feeling forsaken is different from passive anger. This is the suffering story of self-pity. In this story, our difficulty becomes the grand narrative. It is hard to release ourselves from this narrative long enough to listen to someone else’s story without wanting our difficulty to become central to their lives as well.

“Satan exploits pain by making it the central focus of the man’s (or woman’s) thoughts and attitudes.” Erwin W. Lutzer in *When You’ve Been Wronged*

This may be “the story” to which Satan would most love to see all depression-anxiety devolve. In this story we are not just miserable; we begin to believe we are rejected by our only source of hope – God himself. Our emotional instincts become so distorted that North literally feels like South. Our emotions are so strong-loud in our mind that it becomes increasingly difficult to doubt them even when they’re clearly inaccurate.

How or when has your depression-anxiety said, “I am forsaken by God and anyone else who would care”?

---



---

**Read Psalm 13.** Notice the competing story lines in this psalm: feeling forsaken (v. 1-4) and knowing of God’s love (v. 5-6). Both themes existed in the same person. Both themes are common enough to human experience that God included this in the hymnbook of Israel. Often it is the condemnation we feel over the first theme that causes us to shrink back from embracing the second. Use this psalm as a model for how to pray with both honesty about how you feel and a level of hope that does not give your feelings the final word.

8. **“I have no hope.”** At this point life is becoming a non-story. You are existing from event to event, but any sense of meaning to life has faded away. Numbness has likely replaced anxiety-depression as the primary descriptor of your experience. In this story, people can almost long to feel depressed-anxious again because it would be a sign of life. This is in this kind of story in which thoughts of suicide can begin to make sense in an illogical way.

Often it is the inability to articulate these other story-themes results in people arriving in this eighth theme of hopelessness. If you are in this story, hopefully you can now begin to say, “I understand my emotions better and even if they are still painful, this understanding gives me hope.”

If you find yourself in this story, it is vital that you talk to someone. This story makes much more sense when you are alone with it. Like angry arguments you have in your head often fall apart when you try to talk them out with another person, hopeless thinking is less convincing when we share those thoughts with someone who cares.

How or when has your depression-anxiety said, “I have no hope”?

---



---

**Read I Kings 19:1-8.** Notice the even the great prophet Elijah came to the point of despairing of life (v. 4). So did the apostle Paul and his missionary companions (II Corinthians 1:8-9). The story of hopelessness is very tempting and contagious in hard times, even for those that we consider “heroes of the faith.” Notice how God responds to Elijah. He gives him rest which was necessary because the next stage in Elijah’s journey was too much for him without it (v. 7). Allow this compassionate side of God’s character to give you the freedom to be honest with him and trusted friends about your thoughts.

9. **“I need to fit a stereotype of find a quick-fix.”** It may seem odd to think of quick-fix options as a story line, but they can be the therapeutic-emotional version of financial “get rich quick” schemes. The story results in a rapid succession of failures as try one fad solution after another but our emotions don’t change... at least not for long.

First, legitimate approaches to overcoming your depression-anxiety can be short-circuited and “disproven” because of the short-term mindset this storyline promotes. In this story we are prone to want our emotions to respond immediately; like the person who is disappointed they haven’t lost weight after their first day at the gym.

Second, you begin to implement questionable remedies or read *Fix-Your-Emotions-By-Friday* style books. The more we explore these options, the more it makes the work of emotional hygiene seem like they are “going the extra mile” instead of the basics of life. Anything that discourages perseverance in our battle with depression-anxiety should be guarded against closely.

How or when has your depression-anxiety said, “There must be a quick fix”?

---



---

**Read Isaiah 40:27-31.** Notice that it is those who “wait for the Lord” who will “renew their strength” (v. 31). God does not grow weary (v. 28), but we do even in our prime (v. 30). This is not permission to be passive in the process of change – but if you’re in step four of this material, your passivity is a minimal concern. Rather it is a passage that manages our expectations about the duration or time change requires. When we change in healthy, holistic, God-dependent ways we can usually expect the change to provide enduring and lasting results (v. 31).

- 10. **“I know my Redeemer is with me, and I will humbly wait for his deliverance.”** This list would be woefully incomplete without this story line. There are many people who battle with depression-anxiety with great faith and faithfulness for years. They hurt for reasons beyond their control, manage the things under their control well, and maintain a healthy relationship with God in the process.

Doubtless, they wish they could move on to “the next chapter of their life” without depression-anxiety and likely pray repeatedly for relief from their suffering. Their faith is marked by their struggle like a football player’s helmet is marked by the battle of a game, and that is what makes it precious. A helmet that’s never been worn on a field of play by a real player may be in better condition but is less valuable than one that has.

This is not meant to glorify the experience of depression-anxiety. No one who has experienced these emotions in their chronic form would ever say that. But we do want you to see that faithfulness in the midst of the experience of depression-anxiety is both possible (i.e., faith and depression-anxiety are not antonyms) and highly valued (i.e., precious to God and a needed testimony in the church).

How or when has your depression-anxiety said, “I trust God, but this is hard”?

---



---



---

**Read II Corinthians 12:1-10.** We see that Paul had an affliction which was troublesome enough that he begged God many times to remove it (v. 8; e.g., “three times” likely means three seasons of earnest request, not merely three individual petitions). In Paul’s case it was given to keep him humble (v. 7), but this need not to be the case in every instance of persistent suffering. However, the opportunity for us to display God’s grace as sufficient in our weakness (v. 9) is something that is possible in every instance of suffering. Our goal should be to use our moments of weakness to discover new ways to rest in God’s strength (v. 10). This should remove the shame we often feel about these emotions and replace it with a sense of God’s honor (I Corinthians 12:22-26).

These are not the only ten destructive themes of suffering that can be used to make sense of your emotions. Hopefully, they are representative of the kinds of thinking that take the pain of depression-anxiety and make suffering the main theme of your life story.

More than this, it is hoped that this section gives you a pattern (1) to **articulate** the destructive messages of your suffering, (2) to honestly **acknowledge** the pain, and (3) to **counter** them with Scripture even before you see (4) how they are **replaced** with the gospel (chapter six).

**Articulate:** What other destructive themes do you use to make sense of your depression-anxiety?

---



---



---

**Acknowledge:** How do these messages contribute to or intensify the pain that you feel?

---



---



---

**Counter:** How does Scripture counter the core beliefs or perspective of your suffering story? Which passages?

---



---



---

**Replace:** Knowing truth is different from having that truth become the dominant theme of your life. You may be discouraged as you’ve read counters to your suffering story, which haven’t yet seemed to overpower the depression-anxiety you feel. Begin now by praying a simple honest prayer to God about where you are. Use the simply, desperate prayer of the father who feared for life of his child as an outline, “I believe; help my unbelief (Mark 9:24)!”

### From Facts to Themes to Story

How do we develop an experience into a story? The answer to this question will be unique to each person. While we may all interpret painful life experiences with similar themes or combination of themes, the way we move from events to story is not uniform.

Rather than proposing a model of story development that seeks to capture the thought process of every person, it would be better to provide a guided, inductive tour of how you have moved from experience to story. Start by reflecting on what you have learned to this point in the process.

- How you have already begun to make sense of the past, present, and future with the ten themes above or ones you added to the list?
- Which of the themes do you naturally gravitate towards?
- Is this gravitation new (only beginning with your most recent depression-anxiety experience) or a long standing tendency?
- How have these themes distorted your interpretation of new life events not directly related to your depression-anxiety?
- How have these themes distorted your interpretation of past events not directly related to your depression-anxiety?
- How have these themes distorted your anticipation of future life events?
- What phrases or thoughts capture your preferred theme(s)? How often do you say them to yourself or others?
- Who or what has become more and less trusted or enjoyable as your depression-anxiety has endured?

As you reflect on these questions, it should help you see how you are moving from facts to story. If you do not like what you discover, do not be alarmed. The fact that you can see the destructive themes as “not good,” means that the destructive themes do not have the place of dominance in your heart and mind.

#### Encouragement Focus (SUFFERING STORY):

With each step, we will provide questions you should invite another person to ask you openly so they can know and encourage you in the process of grieving your loss or pain.

- Which of the 10 suffering story themes best capture the way you give meaning to depression-anxiety?
- When and how are these themes most repeated or strongest in the way you think?
- How well are you caring for yourself in the ways advised in chapter one?

With each step, we advise you to confide at least one new element of your suffering to your encouragement partner.

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

## Chapter 5. “God, Can We Rest on this Journey?”

MOURN the wrongness of what happened and receive God’s comfort.

**“I am willing to agree with God emotionally about my suffering.  
I can see that God does not just want me to ‘get over this’  
but instead he desires to ‘love me through my pain.’ [describe difference]  
I will accept that ‘blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted (Matt 5:4)’.”**

**Memorize:** Isaiah 14:3-4 (ESV), “When the Lord has given you rest from your pain and turmoil and the hard service with which you were made to serve, you will take up this taunt against the king of Babylon: ‘How the oppressor has ceased, the insolent fury ceased!’” As you memorize this passage reflect upon these key points:

- “Given you rest” – Rest is a gift that God wants to give you. Taking time to mourn is not wasting God’s time.
- “From pain... turmoil” – God takes time to list the types of challenges we face; that add to our need for rest.
- “Made to serve” – God is acknowledging that this suffering was forced upon his people; they did not choose it.
- “King of Babylon” – Often pre-figures Satan’s role in the life of New Testament believers.
- “Oppressor has ceased” – There will be a time when we get to say this about Satan’s tool of depression-anxiety.

### Teaching Notes

“Any time a difficult experience has some longevity in our lives, we can gradually derive some personal identity from it (p. 261).” Ed Welch in *Depression, A Stubborn Darkness*

“The general rule is that those who listen most and speak least will be the most useful to sufferers (p. 6).” David Murray in *Christians Get Depressed Too*

“The most helpful thing for me was the meals, the offers to do a load of laundry or take the children for the afternoon. Even though I did not accept these offers because of a misplaced sense of pride, which depression can foster, knowing that someone cared enough to offer was a source of encouragement (p. 34).” Kathryn Greene-McCreight in *Darkness Is My Only Companion*

“The recovery ministries are not right for most people with mental illness. The idea of recovery reinforces the message that we want to help you ‘get over’ your problem so you can be a normal, fully functioning member of the community... This approach is appropriate for issues that truly lend themselves to recovery, but it’s not appropriate for most mental illness (p. 117).” Amy Simpson in *Troubled Minds*

“Satan is attracted to the inward-turning instincts of depression. Satan can use times of depression as an opportunity for an all-out assault on our faith and confidence in God. He can use the ‘dark night of the soul’ to cast doubt on the goodness and love of God (p. 138).” Brian Borgman in *Feelings and Faith*

“All sufferers are tempted to believe that their suffering is unique. This lie immediately renders all counsel irrelevant because no one understands and no advice applies. The result is that the aloneness you already experience is now an established fact, and you are given ever more permission to despair (p. 69).” Ed Welch in *Depression, A Stubborn Darkness*

## Embedded Study

What are we supposed to do with bad news? Step four reveals a large amount of “bad news” – narratives we place upon our experience of depression-anxiety which leave us feeling shame or like God is absent. What are we supposed to do with that kind of bad news?

The tempting answer is “make it better... spin it positive... fast... if we can use the Bible, all the better; that way we’re more likely to believe what we’re telling ourselves.” Chances are you’ve tried that and have the scars which rushed emotional change produces to prove it.

So let’s ask a better question, “How does God want to care for you as you come to grips with these false narratives?” Does God want to free you with truth (John 8:32)? Yes, but he also wants to free you in a way that is bearable and sustainable. God wants your change to last and to be motivated by grace instead of shame or fear.

That means God wants you to grieve the presence of suffering in your life. God does not think you are whining when you acknowledge that depression-anxiety has been a heavy burden. God wants you to know his care during your suffering so that we will rely upon his care in the midst of future blessings and hardships.

Mourning is the focus of this chapter. We want you to feel free to mourn the presence of depression-anxiety (agreeing with God about the hardship of suffering) instead of feeling shame about it (hiding it from God and others in order to appear strong). Mourning our suffering allows us to quit faking strength so that we free to rely on God’s strength and his people.

We will examine the subject of morning in four sections:

1. What Is Being Mourned?
2. Differentiating Mourning from Wallowing
3. How to Mourn
4. That’s Not Helpful: Things Not to Say

### What Is Being Mourned?

Grief not related to a physical death can be hard to identify. It may feel like you’re being told, “I’m supposed to feel sad (mourn) because I’m sad (depressed).” However, the persistent experience of depression-anxiety, especially when it is not caused by actions or values over which you have control, can result in many losses which should be grieved in order to be processed in a healthy way. We will look at five potential losses.

1. **Trust for Your Own Emotions:** When you’re emotions have been dominated by depression-anxiety for an extended period of time emotions can begin to feel like more of a foe than friend. Numbness becomes mistaken as a pleasantly neutral experience. Events or relationships that trigger any type of emotion begin to be dreaded because “to feel” is perceived as a threatening experience.

Yet, this is akin to mistrusting breathing. You can’t not feel; the dread of emotion is itself a feeling. But when we fail to acknowledge this mistrust of our emotions the only options we leave ourselves is emotional unrest. Oddly, grieving this loss of trust is often the first step towards trusting our emotions again. It is through grieving that we receive comfort (Matthew 5:4); from God and others.

Your initial goal is to feel sad about your suffering without feeling shame or fear. Shame and fear are “emotions of mistrust” and perpetuate the misunderstanding that your depression-anxiety is morally wrong or unsafe.

Imagine the child who learns that home is a safe place because they can get hurt, cry, receive comfort, and re-engage life. That is the kind of experience you should expect with God and your emotions. They may still hurt at times. It is okay to express this emotional pain. There is comfort to be received. Trust for this process is what allows you to re-engage life with hope.

2. **Sense of Invincibility:** Until we don’t, we are prone to believe we can bounce back from anything. People tend to grieve their youth after they play a sport and don’t bounce back well the next day. It becomes clear they lost

something. Similarly, when it becomes harder for us to bounce back from the experience of depression-anxiety, we come to grips with our mortality in an unpleasant way.

Sometimes we would rather be afraid than weak, even when being weak means we could be protected. When we lose our sense of invincibility all we are losing is an illusion. But if we've found a false sense of security in this illusion we will grieve its passing.

This is another way that mourning sets us up for greater emotional health. Until we mourn the death of false beliefs like these we will not consider them dead; instead, we will, at best, doubt them. It is like a bad friend with whom we have an intense argument but return to later. Instead, it is sober, awkward conversations about ending the relationship that result in both grief and finally ending of the dysfunctional friendship.

3. **Identity:** During a prolonged experience of depression-anxiety we can take on many stigmatized labels which become part of our identity – crazy, broken, different, disabled, deficient, etc... In these situations, depression-anxiety impacts our identity as we seek to avoid how we fear others will perceive us.

For others, it is not the stigma but the longevity of the experience that creates an altered sense of identity. What they feel becomes who they are. Often it is said, “I can't remember what it was like not to be depressed.” In this scenario, depression-anxiety impacts our identity by outlasting and overpowering other sources of identity.

Mourning is an important step in living outside our fear of stigma. Through mourning, we are honest about our experience and become sad for (not embittered against) those who are not mature or informed enough to understand our suffering. Their identity becomes “ignorant” instead of our identity becoming “deficient.”

When we mourn we are acknowledging that we will outlive our depression-anxiety. Only survivors can mourn. Mourning is something we do when we realize there is a “next chapter” to our story. Whether that is the partial-temporal relief that comes from living wisely now or the eternal-total relief of the full redemption we will experience in heaven, mourning affirms that depression-anxiety will not have the last word on our lives.

4. **Sense of Proportionality:** An often-overlooked loss during prolonged depression-anxiety is a sense of proportionality. Fear and despair tend to make some parts of life seem disproportionately large and other parts of life disproportionately small (i.e., insignificant). We know we are living in a world of emotional carnival mirrors but we don't know how to stop.

The result is that we lose a sense of proportionality – how much do the things that bother us matter? On the one hand, we trust our emotions absolutely. After all, how do you doubt your emotions (an important part of chapter six)? On the other hand, we know our emotions are not accurate. We are stuck listening to something (our emotions) we don't believe but find incredibly convincing.

Mourning is an important part of jettisoning this conflicted state of mind. Mourning is a time when it is safe / acceptable to be uncertain and disoriented. Mourning is a time when we'll invite others into this experience. Mourning is a process whereby we begin to weigh out how much things matter. Consider how many times you've heard someone say, “I didn't realize how much [blank] did or didn't matter until I lost [blank]”?

5. **Friends:** The unfortunate reality is that the experience of anxiety-depression can put a strain on friendships. Parts of this we must take responsibility for – neglecting time together because of the apathy of depression, taking on controlling tendencies as a unhealthy way to manage our fears, etc... We should not presume it is our friend's fault if friendships deteriorate under these kinds of conditions.

That may be hard to receive, but the only alternative is to fall into a sense of false powerlessness about the things that led to the demise of these friendships. Your attempts to restore these relationships would be subverted by a sense of dishonesty with yourself that would prevent you from relating to these friends in healthy ways.

Mourning is an important part of these restorative efforts. Even if you bore significant responsibility for it, you still lost something. Mourning is how we emotionally disempower these losses so that we can talk about them in a healthy,

accurate way. Consider a funeral. Initially the survivor may be unable to speak of their loved one without powerful emotions and idealizing their loved one, but with the process of grief they become able to have these emotionally-controlled and factually-accurate conversations.

What other losses have you experienced as a result of depression-anxiety and what unique benefits would come from mourning them? \_\_\_\_\_

---



---

**Read Isaiah 53:3 and Hebrews 4:14-5:10.** Notice that one of Jesus’ titles was “man of sorrows.” This was a title so central to his mission that it was highlighted in his pre-release advertisements (i.e., the Old Testament). The idea is carried over in the New Testament and is meant to encourage us about God’s compassion for our plight. His example is meant to be followed by our fellow believers (5:4) but only Jesus learned from his suffering so perfectly that he can relate to us in our pain as we desire (5:8). In these passages, see that God delights to be patient and compassionate with his children when they are suffering. God is not impatiently waiting for you to “quit whining” and “get back to work.” God wants to see you fully restored to the joy he intends for you.

### Differentiating Mourning from Wallowing

There are many things that unhealthy wallowing and healthy mourning have in common. It can be easier to confuse one from the other than many people think. The person who thinks he is “working through” his pain may be wallowing in self-pity. Those who try to rouse their friend out of self-pity may be rushing them through legitimate mourning.

Unfortunately, there is no emotional litmus test to verify the difference in these two experiences. However, we can (a) clarify what wallowing and mourning share in common, so we are less prone to assume the overlapping experiences necessarily indicate their counterpart. We can also (b) identify distinguishing marks between wallowing and mourning so that we know what to look for in order to rightly identify the emotional experience.

Let’s begin by considering the similarities of mourning and wallowing.

- Both are triggered by an undesired life circumstance.
- Both exist on the unpleasant end of the emotional spectrum.
- Both feel justified and logical in light of the triggering experience.
- Neither feels like we are “doing” them but that they are “happening” to us.
- Both involve a high degree of mental repetition.
- Both are seeking to make sense of life in light of the unpleasant experience.
- Both begin to shape the way you interpret the events and people around you.
- Both shape the way you anticipate and prepare for the future.
- Both change the way that you remember past events.

What do you gain from this bulleted list? A realization that *none* of these criteria are able to distinguish mourning from wallowing. Each criterion is true for both. It is as if you were asked to distinguish a square from a rectangle. You could say, “It has four sides and each corner formed a ninety degree angle.” This is true for both a square and a rectangle, so it does not help you differentiate the two shapes.

Why take the time to draw these parallels? Often people believe some of these symptoms always indicate either healthy mourning or unhealthy wallowing. When you have these experiences all you know is that you’re hurting. It is not clear whether this pain is part of a healthy or unhealthy process; contributing to a redemptive or destructive story line.

This should give you freedom to consider the criteria that follows. Never will our emotions or motives be as pure as we would like. Your goal at this point is not that you “mourn perfectly” but that your experience be increasingly free from qualities that are indicative of wallowing.

- **Wallowing Fears Hope but Mourning Trusts Hope.** How much do you find yourself arguing with those who want to encourage you even before they make their point; maybe even before you have the opportunity to talk with them? This is an indicator that you’ve begun to fear hope. You are bracing against being “up” again because you fear falling “down” afterwards.

When we give into this temptation then anxiety or depressed become the only “safe” ways to feel. Anything that is pleasant is immediately labeled untrustworthy. When this shift from mourning to wallowing is made, our “common sense” barricades us against the progress we desire.

Proverbs 13:12 says, “Hope deferred makes the heart sick.” Those who struggle with depression-anxiety often succumb to believing the solution is to stop hoping. That is the equivalent of a cancer patient concluding, “If chemo leaves me feeling weak, then quitting chemo will make me feel strong.” This result is making the depressive-anxious experience chronic.

- **Wallowing Resents Joy but Mourning Longs for Joy.** Resentment has a way of flipping our values. If we were made fun of because of struggles in school, then the resulting resentment can cause us to downplay formal education in favor of “good ol’ common sense.” Similarly, if we were ridiculed for being poor, then there is a tendency to think that people who have nice things are bad (i.e., dishonest, condescending, etc...). A virtue (education) or asset (wealth) begins to be viewed as a vice because of our resentment.

The same thing happens when our depression-anxiety begins to make us feel rejected or deficient. We can begin to view a blessing (joy) as a vice (something we resent, fear, and resist). We begin to identify with our misery to such a degree that we don’t want to be like “those people” who “think they are better than we are” even though there is no rivalry and we know it would be better to have joy. But it feels like we would be “betraying our team.”

Mourning is sad, but it hasn’t quit desiring joy; neither has it removed joy from the category of “desirable virtue.” This requires emotional strength. It is hard to continue wanting a good thing you do not have and are not sure you will be able to obtain. It is easier, although unhealthy, to turn your back on the good thing as a cruel joke faked by people who are, in some way, against you.

- **Wallowing Is Skeptical Towards Faith but Mourning Listens to Faith.** Who or what you are willing to listen to says a great deal about you. When mourning gives way to wallowing hearing words of faith – from Scripture or a friend – begin to be heard through a filter of mistrust or cynicism.

Consider for a moment how you listen to a news program that does not share your political views or a telemarketer who is telling about a life-changing product. Compare this to how you hear statements of faith in the midst of your depressed-anxious experience.

The more you instinctively hear these messages with skepticism the more mourning has given way to wallowing. Your initial goal should not necessarily be to fully embrace the messages of faith you’re hearing. You can begin much smaller; just hear these messages neutrally and know they’re intended for your good. Even if this initially causes you to feel sad, it is a step towards transforming wallowing into mourning.

- **Wallowing Resists Being Strong but Mourning Embraces Strength.** Both mourning and wallowing are exhausting. Mourning results in the exhaustion of a marathon runner – someone who realizes their journey is a mark of strength. Wallowing results in the exhaustion of prey acquiescing to a predator – someone who is giving up.

Either way the exhaustion is real. The marathon runner and the gazelle succumbing to a lion are both legitimately tired. The question is whether you view where you are as hopeless or as evidence of God’s continuing ability and willingness to sustain you. You have relied on God’s grace to this point – willingly or reluctantly – and that same grace is available for whatever journey lies ahead.

Do not confuse the metaphor of running with the need to rush. If that were the case, then we would not be at the mid-point of a nine step journey. Neither should you begin to view God as a cruel track coach. The things you learn in this experience are not necessarily “God trying to teach you a lesson” (in the harsh connotation of that phrase). Too often we view every lesson we learn in suffering as God’s purpose statement for that experience; this causes us to mistrust our source of strength during these times.

- **Wallowing Avoids Being Known but Mourning Invites Community.** Most of the points above focus on the intrapersonal differences between mourning and wallowing – those things going on inside of us. This final point looks at an interpersonal difference – how we relate to others differently.

When shame turns mourning into wallowing we resist allowing others to know us well. We become slippery – able to answer people’s questions without allowing them to really know us. With time, we begin to cynically disbelieve that others care or are able to understand.

The reality is that we limit how much we can be cared for by others with how much we make ourselves known to them. If we are 50% known, then we will (at best) be able to receive 50% of the care they offer. Shame convinces us that “if they really knew” they would not mean what they said or do what they did. The result is a corruption of each act of kindness or word of encouragement offered to us.

Using these criteria, how would you describe your current response to the experience of depression-anxiety: mourning or wallowing? Which criteria gave you the most insight about your response?

---



---



---

### How to Mourn

Hopefully you have identified what you are mourning and learned more about the destructive counterfeit of mourning—wallowing. But the question remains, “How do I mourn? It doesn’t seem right to have a funeral. There is nothing to bury. So how do I mourn?”

**Read Joel 1:1-2:25:** Often we quote Joel 2:25 without seeing the journey that preceded it. Christian grief is grief-with-hope because of the power of God’s resurrection (1 Thes. 4:13-18). We know that God can, and ultimately will, “restore to you the years that the swarming locust have eaten.” But noticed how God used mourning as preparation to receive this promise (1:8-9, 1:12-14, 2:12-13). In this passage of Scripture they were mourning their personal sin. You are mourning your suffering. But the principle remains applicable, mourning is an important preparation to the work God intends to do in our life. When we miss this we begin to feel guilty and condemned by God for participating in this preparatory work of restoration He is doing in our lives.

Mourning is not nearly as active or voluntary as we want it to be. We want to master it so we can accelerate the process. Attempts to do so are generally unhealthy, so if that is what you are hoping for, the points below may disappoint you. But the five points below will give you as practical and active guidance as possible to help you grieve the losses you have experienced related to your experience of depression-anxiety.

1. **Realize mourning is not an event you can calendar.** There is no recipe or time table. Mourning is not a matter of crying for five consecutive hours with intermittent twenty minutes breaks of written reflection on painfully relevant questions with a concluding ceremony of destroying what you’ve written. Mourning may involve crying and reflection. It may even be assisted by symbolically destroying what you’ve written. But these steps, nor any others, “are mourning.”

Mourning requires letting yourself be weak and cared for by God in light of your suffering. The experience of depression-anxiety has likely made being “out of control” like this seem very unsettling. But it is this willingness or regained ability to surrender yourself to God’s protection that is the primary evidence that mourning is having its intended redemptive effect.

“You don’t need to be fixed (p. 1)... Cars and refrigerators break down; people don’t. We shed tears, cry, or weep. We were created to cry. It’s a fitting response to sorrow (p. 32)... Grief brings you into the world of the unknown (p. 4)... Grieving is a disorderly process. You won’t control it, nor can you schedule its expression (p.12).” H. Norman Wright in *Experiencing Grief*

2. **Do not feel rushed.** We would rather know if we are “on pace” than if we’re “mourning healthily.” If there was a set time table, then we would know how close we were to being finished. But time’s role in grief is more similar to a gymnastics floor routine than a stop-watch in sprinting. Sprinting is all about making the time number as small as possible. Gymnastics has to do with how well you perform your allotted task within the given time.

If the gymnast tries to “go fast” there is no advantage (likely a detriment) to her final score. Similarly, when we try to accelerate the grieving process we usually introduce unhealthy practices or beliefs that add to the emotional disruption. When we focus upon being as healthy as possible in the process we receive the best “score” – a healthy outcome that honors God.

3. **Rest in God’s care before next stage of journey.** A primary indicator that you are ready to begin the next step is when you can view this step as revealing God’s care for you. When you can view this step as God giving you rest rather than putting you in emotional time out you are likely ready to continue.

However, with that said, you will not finish mourning before beginning next step six. There will still be times when your losses illicit fresh sadness. But you will have the skills to process those emotions and, more than the skills, you will have a trust in God’s care for you that will give you the emotional freedom to process those moments.

4. **Your goal is to assimilate steps 1-3 without the contamination of step 4.** The goal of healthy grief is to accept hard realities without the corrupting narrative of destructive lies. In this material, that means you accept the things you learned in steps one through three without encasing them in whichever narratives you were most prone to in chapter four.

Initially this may feel disorienting, especially if you have held to the destructive narratives from chapter four for an extended period of time to make sense of your depression-anxiety. In chapter six we will examine the redemptive narrative that can make healthier, better sense of your experience.

In the meantime, you may feel like a person without a story. But realize that is like the sprayer being unloaded of herbicide (plant killer) before it can be reloaded with fertilizer. You are being emptied, not to be left bare, but to be filled with something life-giving and nourishing instead of emotionally toxic. Your narrative loss is actually a gain. Once it is replaced it will be an incomparable gain.

5. **Realize sadness is not the final chapter.** This bold promise should be tempered; otherwise it could easily become false hope. Losing your suffering story is a gain. Embracing the gospel narrative for your suffering is incomparable gain. But you are still living in the middle of the story.

With the gospel we always live between the “already” and the “not yet.” The power of sin is *already* broken, but the presence of sin is *not yet* removed. The promise of heaven is *already* given, but the experience of heaven is *not yet* known. The remedy of suffering is *already* guaranteed, but the existence of suffering is *not yet* eliminated.

In the gospel we are able to live without doubt but with only partial relief. Through sanctification – living out the character and mind of God in our circumstances by his grace – we experience incrementally more relief. But this relief is not total until God wipes away our last tear as we permanently enter his presence (Rev. 21:4).

### “That’s Not Helpful:” Things Not to Say

Have you every googled “stupid things people say at funerals”? It can be a painful, yet awkwardly funny, read. When faced with the pain of another person, people often say unhelpful things trying to assuage their own discomfort of not knowing how to “make things better.” When you are talking about your experience of depression-anxiety, you may experience a similar phenomenon.

This is unfortunate, but it is not a reason to isolated yourself. It is, however, a common reason those who struggle with depression-anxiety begin to pull away from friends. We discuss it here for two reasons. First, we want to equip the church

to care well for these emotional struggles. The first part of caring well is listening. The first part of listening well is resisting the urge to say something the kinds of things listed below.

“Treatment starts with empathetic listening, taking people seriously, and not denying or minimizing symptoms (p. 18).” Robert Albers, William Meller, and Steven Thurber in *Ministry with Persons with Mental Illness and Their Families*

Second, we want you to be less surprised and offended when / if it happens. Surprise enhances offense. When something catches us off guard and we do not understand why it happens, it is more emotionally painful. This is why we want to provide you with David Murray’s list of “things not to say to a depressed person” (from *Christians Get Depressed Too*, p. 98). If you hear these things early in a conversation with someone, realize they are likely unintentionally spoken for their comfort more than your benefit.

- Pull yourself together.
- But you've got nothing to be sad about.
- Don't get so emotional.
- You'll get over it soon.
- It's a sin to be depressed.
- Just believe the promises.
- Smile it can't be that bad.
- Well things could be worse.
- It least it's nothing serious.
- You should confess your sins.
- You're not still on medication, are you?

### Conclusion

Realize that God is not rushing you on your journey out of depression-anxiety. If anything, we are often disappointed by his patience. We want God to push us through the process faster. But God is the ultimate gentleman, honoring us on at every stage of our journey.

There is no merit in a slow journey or fast journey through anxiety-depression. All God desires of / for us is faithfulness. This step has been intended to help you embrace this truth. As you take the remaining steps to combat your experience of depression-anxiety, do so with the full assurance that God agrees with your tears when you cry out “this is hard.” You do not have to argue with one who is well acquainted with grief (Isa 53:3). He is the Good Shepherd who is willing to tenderly walk at the pace of his sheep.

### Encouragement Focus (MOURN):

With each step, we will provide questions you should invite another person to ask you openly so they can know and encourage you in the process of grieving your loss or pain.

- Have you honestly assessed what losses you are mourning related to your depression-anxiety?
- Are you actively guarding against allowing this time of mourning degenerating into wallowing?
- How well are you caring for yourself in the ways advised in chapter one?

With each step, we advise you to confide at least one new element of your suffering to your encouragement partner.

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

## Chapter 6.

### “Hard Emotions in a Redemptive Story”

LEARN MY GOSPEL STORY by which God gives meaning to my experience.

**“I have already told you how my depression-anxiety has shaped my life [review step 4].  
Letting go of that story, identity, and set of beliefs left me with only God.  
It was good to begin rebuilding my life from that solid foundation.  
Now I am beginning to understand my life with God and the Gospel at the center  
[examples from previous list reinterpreted].”**

**Memorize:** Psalm 30:8-12 (ESV), “To you, O Lord, I cry, and to the Lord I plead for mercy: ‘What profit is there in my death, if I go down to the pit? Will the dust praise you? Will it tell of your faithfulness? Hear, O Lord, and be merciful to me! O Lord, be my helper!’ // You have turned for me my mourning into dancing; you have loosed my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness, that my glory may sing your praise and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give thanks to you forever!” As you memorize this passage reflect upon these key points:

- “I cry... I plead” – This psalm does not begin “neatly.” The emotions are raw and desperate.
- “What profit” – This reveals a battle with a destructive suffering story – Is God trying to turn a profit on my life?
- “My helper” – Yet even in this false narrative the psalmist is fighting to maintain an accurate view of God.
- “You have turned” – The negative circumstances were not erased but transformed in a new narrative.
- “You have loosed” – The result was the removal of sackcloth, a cultural emblem of depressed-anxious emotions.

#### Teaching Notes

“When we let go of our internal stories and unrealistic expectations about how things should go, we will experience life’s disappointments in a more peaceful way. In other words, choppy waves on the surface of the ocean don’t necessarily disturb the calm below (p. 93).” Leslie Vernick in *Lord, I Just Want to Be Happy*

“For the Christian, who believes in the crucified and risen Messiah, suffering is always meaningful. It is meaningful because of the one in whose suffering we participate, Jesus... The personal suffering of the Christian finds a correlate in Christ’s suffering, which gathers up our tears, calms our sorrows, and points us toward his resurrection (p. 37).” Kathryn Greene-McCreight in *Darkness Is My Only Companion*

“I would come to refuse the self-pity and blaming of others. I learned to remind myself of my belief that life is a gift (p. 27).” Kathryn Greene-McCreight in *Darkness Is My Only Companion*

“Optimism is not about providing a recipe for self-deception. The world can be a horrible, cruel place, and at the same time it can be wonderful and abundant. These are both truths. There is not a halfway point; there is only choosing which truth to put in your personal foreground (p. 205).” Lee Ross, Professor at Stanford University, as quoted by Leslie Vernick in *Lord, I Just Want to Be Happy*

“Hope is the opposite of fear. Hope is a prediction that God will be good (p. 49)... ‘Be strong and courageous (Joshua 1:9).’ A phrase like that, just dangling on its own, doesn’t work. You can’t simply command a frightened person to be strong and courageous, and expect a transformation. What makes the command work is this part: ‘God will be with you wherever you go’ (p. 66).” Ed Welch in *When I Am Afraid*

“Have you realized that most of your unhappiness in life is due to the fact that you are listening to yourself instead of talking to yourself?... You must take yourself in hand, you have to address yourself, you have to preach to yourself, question yourself... Then you must go on to remind yourself of God, who God is, and what God is and what God has done in what God has pledged himself to do (p. 20-21).” D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones in *Spiritual Depression*

## Embedded Study

Chapter four may have left you without a story. You looked at the events and impact of your depression-anxiety in chapters two and three, then let go of the destructive narratives that you used to explain them in chapter four. In chapter five you learned to mourn the presence of depression-anxiety without giving in to unhealthy wallowing.

To this point it is as if you found an old pocket watch on a walk through the woods. It was dirty and tarnished. You’ve disassembled its parts to clean and polish them. You appreciate its value enough to be sad for the person who lost it. Now we’re about to begin the process of putting it back together again.

Chapter six is intended to give you the right story out of which to live out the practical directives you’ll find in chapters seven and eight. Just like an athlete can train hard for revenge (one story line) or to reach his full potential (a different, healthy story line), we can strive for healthy emotions with several different narratives fueling / explaining our actions.

The reason we take the time for this step is not primarily about effectiveness; many athletes train very well when they are seeking revenge. Our goal in this chapter is to ensure that our pursuit of emotional health is spiritually healthy.

In this chapter we will seek to answer six questions that often become distorted in our struggle with depression-anxiety. We will offer key points of clarification that are commonly helpful for re-orienting people’s struggle through anxiety-depression, but encourage you to take the time to write out your thoughts on what a healthy response to your experience of depression-anxiety would be.

1. Who Am I Now?
2. Who and Where Is God?
3. What Should I Expect from My Friends?
4. What Is Sin If This Is Suffering?
5. Is Hope Worth Disappointment?
6. What Am I Living For?

## Who Am I Now?

“What does depression-anxiety say about me?” is a natural question to ask. Unfortunately, these emotions can carry a stigma in our culture. The result is that we begin to build our story about the messages, “I’m bad... I’m broken... Something is wrong with me.” Feeling shame over things for which God does not consider us guilty does two things:

- (1) *distorts how we apply the gospel to our lives* – trying to repent of things God intends to comfort instead of forgive,
- (2) *distorts our sense of identity* – relatively less important parts of our life become “the main thing” about us.

## Strong Enough to Be Weak

Hopefully one of the primary things you’ve gained from this study is the strength to be weak. Nothing makes us crumble at our core like the perceived need to be stronger than we are. Conversely, nothing maximizes the strength God gives us like the freedom to acknowledge our need for grace, help, and encouragement.

**Read 2 Corinthians 1:8-11.** Notice how Paul was strong enough to acknowledge his weaknesses. He was despondent enough to consider suicide and readily admits he was burdened beyond his personal capacity to bear it (v. 8b). Yet, he does not seem to be shame-based in the way he shares his story (v. 8a). He invites his friends to pray for him (v. 11). Paul is both thankful for God’s past deliverance and realistic about his need for God’s future deliverance (v. 10).

**Question:** How have you grown in your willingness to be “strong enough to be weak” during your experience of depression-anxiety? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### Loved Enough to Be Vulnerable

Our primary source of strength (previous point) is God’s love. The only reason any of us can love – have the ability to care deeply about life and others – is because God first loved us (1 John 4:19). Often we fear that displaying weakness will result in rejection. The gospel assures us that God will never turn us away because our suffering is “too much trouble” and is always willing to forgive whatever sin we’ve committed when we repent. Having assurance in our relationship with God provides a firm enough foundation to be increasingly authentic with others.

**Read Romans 8:31-39.** Personalize this passage for your experience. In place of “death... demons... persecution, etc...” list out the things that you fear would make you unacceptable or unusable by God – perhaps: panic attacks, depression, flash backs, anxiety, pessimistic attitude, manic episodes, etc... Realize afresh that none of these can separate you from the love of God (v. 39). You are loved, period, and this makes your life a different kind of story – a redemptive one.

**Question:** When would the reality that you are “loved enough to be vulnerable” make the biggest difference in your emotions and choices? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### Able Enough to Be Passionate

Depression-anxiety does not need to be a handicap. The experience is real. It does present challenges. But too often the experience of depression-anxiety becomes a reason for people not to dream about how God uniquely gifted them to change the world. One of the best combatants against allowing depression-anxiety to dominate your life is to invest yourself in the things God made you passionate about and good at. Too often we allow our weaknesses and limitations to become a distraction from our strengths and calling.

**Read Ephesians 2:8-10.** Notice there is no exception clause stating, “...except those who experience depression-anxiety.” There is no such thing as a second-class Christian. The category is a figment of our insecure imaginations. To whatever degree there are “weaker Christians,” God is clear that he gives greater honor to them (1 Corinthians 12:21-26). It may be wise to pace yourself to avoid fatigue that would exacerbate depression-anxiety, but do not confuse pacing yourself with avoiding the pursuit of your passions.

**Question:** What are you passionate about? How has depression-anxiety distracted you from pursuing these interests?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### Who and Where Is God?

There are many God-questions that arise in the midst of depression-anxiety. It is nearly impossible to persistently battle for hope and peace without asking questions directed to or about God. The things discussed below should not be new. They are meant to be crystallizations of what you’ve been learning. Allow these truths about God to become cemented in your story; they should increasingly feel like “givens” as opposed to “possibilities.”

### Near to Those Who are Anxious-Depressed

There is a danger in reading our Bibles in search for God’s answer to depression-anxiety. It begins to make God feel like an absentee father; as if all he offers us is a letter in the mail. A letter would mean both that God cared and that he was far away. This would be both encouraging and disheartening; God’s words would seem sincere but powerless. This is why we must pay careful attention to the thing God most repeats and we most overlook when he speaks about depression-anxiety.

“Anxiety-disordered individuals are often so focused on trying to control their circumstances and avoiding some potential catastrophe that they begin to perceive God as punitive, perfectionistic, and authoritative (p. 109).”  
Matthew Stanford in *Grace for the Afflicted*

**Read I Peter 5:6-9 and Philipians 4:5-9.** The most neglected aspect of both of these passages is the nearness of God. We come to these passages seeking God's "answer" for depression-anxiety. As we search for principles and practical steps, we miss that the first and main thing God offers is himself. When we doubt or rush past God's presence, we begin to expect knowledge to accomplish what only relationship can provide. Yes, God does offer us strategies and truths to combat depression-anxiety, but these are not the first and most important things he offers.

**Question:** Where do you see God in relation to your experience of depression-anxiety? How can you remind yourself of his actual location when your fear / despair feels closer than God? \_\_\_\_\_

---



---

### Inside Your Experience of Depression-Anxiety

Our concept of being "near" does not capture how close God is. If God were merely "next to" us in our suffering, then we would simply feel less alone. That would be nice, but less than transformative. God is actually "in" us as we suffer. There is nothing that occurs in our soul that does not immediately register with him even before we can bring it to him in prayer. God does not begin his response to our suffering when we pray; as if we had to alert him before he would move. God is experiencing our suffering as we do, so our prayer only alerts us to his presence and activity.

**Read Romans 8:23-30.** Notice that God can put our suffering into words better than we can. Why? God is so "with" us that he is "in" us. Our groans make sense to him because he experiences them with us. Actually, they make more sense to him than they do to us because he knows their origin (past), expression (present), and redemption (future). In spite of his knowing the future resolution of our anxiety-depression, notice that God does not grow impatient with our sense of being overwhelmed by them in the present (v. 26).

**Question:** How would your prayers change if you remembered you didn't have to explain your experience to God?

---



---

### Capable of Transforming Suffering

We often think that transformation requires elimination. That is true when a water droplet is transformed to vapor; the droplet no longer exists. But God's transformation of suffering is usually much more like the change in our memories of a loved one during grief. These memories transform from experiences of pain to precious treasures (that may still evoke sadness). This side of heaven God's transformation of our suffering will not be Utopia. This helps us remember that the presence of pain does not mean the absence of God's redemptive work in our suffering.

**Read Hebrews 11:13-16.** Notice this awkward interlude in the midst of Hebrews 11, a chapter commonly referred to as the "Hall of Faith." We would say that God worked mightily in the life of each of these individuals. They are the upper-echelon heroes of the Bible. But also notice that the cliff notes-highlights we read from their life are not the same as their experience of these events. Their experience of following God by faith is much more similar to your experiencing of trusting God in the midst of depression-anxiety than you might have thought.

**Question:** What evidences can you already see of God using your experience of depression-anxiety? What are the incomplete aspects of that redemption with which you'll have to trust God like those in Hebrews 11? \_\_\_\_\_

---



---

## What Should I Expect from My Friends?

### Presence More than Deliverance

Community is wonderful; it is not divine. Often loneliness and insecurity lead us to think that acceptance and compassion from others will make "everything better." With this unrealistic expectation we either become disappointed in the benefits community can provide or demanding, thinking that people are not doing enough (because our struggle is not resolved).

Friends can help alleviate false or destructive thoughts from echoing in our mind by listening well and reminding us of truth... if we are willing to let go of those thoughts. Friends can fill empty blocks of time that would otherwise be given to passivity or fretting... if we are willing to engage with them. Friends can add to the number of things we have to celebrate and pray for as they share their life with us... if we are willing to "do life" with them as they "do life" with us.

**Read Galatians 6:1-5.** To allow others to care for you is to create an opportunity for them to "fulfill the law of Christ (v. 2)." Because this is a one-another-command it should be mutual. You should be looking for ways to bless those who are blessing you. The goal is not to become dependent upon their help, because it is God's design that "each will have to bear his own load (v. 5)." As you strive to bless those who bless you, you will balance out the care provided to/by you and foster a healthy relational environment that is a form of protection from depression-anxiety.

**Question:** Is your tendency to expect too much from or share too little with friends on your journey through depression-anxiety? \_\_\_\_\_

---

### Two-Way Love and Service

Depression-anxiety tends to be a self-centered emotional experience. One of the best ways that friends aid us in our struggle with depression-anxiety is by providing us with someone else to care for and think about. It is important that you see your opportunity to bless your friends as part of their redemptive role in your life. Otherwise we mistake God's answer to our prayers as a burden and think that God's provision is a curse. The alternative to depression-anxiety is not merely joy, but the enjoyment of caring for others.

"Mental illness threatens to turn us in upon ourselves (p. 97)." Kathryn Greene-McCreight in *Darkness Is My Only Companion*

**Read Proverbs 11:25.** In God's relational ecology he accounts for the care of everyone by calling on everyone to care for others. Relationships should be like the transference of oxygen and carbon dioxide between plants and animals. What one breathes out the other takes in for life. Too often, we allow the effects of sin to cause us to grow cynical to this cycle (as if there was an alternative) and everyone begins to relationally suffocate. We become good relational ecologists, not by "looking out for number one," but by fostering an environment that contributes to the flourishing of all.

**Question:** How balanced are the relationships in the support network you began establishing in step one? How can you better set them up to be a long-term sustainable, relational eco-system? \_\_\_\_\_

---

### A Call to Engage Common Pleasures

Friends are an "excuse," in the best sense of the word, to enjoy life. Often, in our struggle with depression-anxiety, we become so focused on making things better that we fail to enjoy what is already good. A good meal, a good conversation, a good round of golf, or a good time shopping can be enjoyed even while other stressors are being addressed. The presence of a friend can give us a reason and the needed focus to enjoy these common pleasures. Savoring simple pleasures is often an important step towards breaking the grip of depression-anxiety.

**Read Proverbs 17:22.** If this is true, then why do we not more frequently take this "good medicine"? One of the primary reasons has to be isolation. A person alone with their depression-anxiety will find little time for life's simple pleasures. We quickly begin to live as if this medicine "is not for us." This is not about being an extrovert, but a recognition that the passivity-paralysis of depression-anxiety often stifles out the pleasures of life. A friend's presence is an excellent reminder that it is good for us to enjoy them again.

**Question:** What are the common pleasures you need to initiate more with your friends? \_\_\_\_\_

---

### What Is Sin, If This Is Suffering?

Admittedly, this is one of the most frustrating parts of this study and its accompaniment. We want the dividing line between sin and suffering to be clearer. One of the greatest benefits you may gain from this study is an extended exercise in learning what to bring to God for forgiveness and what to bring to God for comfort.

#### Not a Neat Divide

You are one person who is perpetually a sinner, sufferer, and saint. God offers you forgiveness, comfort, and a new identity. Depression-anxiety may be the experience for which it is most difficult to sort our moral-emotional laundry. Realize that this is part of what God will use to refine your character during this time of growth. Rest in God's patience; that he will not be harsh with you as you learn. Remain humble enough to receive correction and guidance in the process.

**Read I Peter.** This brief book (only 4 pages in my Bible) of the New Testament focuses on suffering – it is written to Christians who have become exiles due to religious persecution. As you read, notice how Peter addresses sin and suffering while calling his readers back to their identity in Christ. See how hard it is to speak to one aspect of a person's life without the need to address the other. Allow this to balance how you apply this suffering-based treatment of depression-anxiety with the sin-based sequel.

**Question:** How are you growing in your ability to distinguish the suffering-based aspects of your depression-anxiety from its sin-based aspects? \_\_\_\_\_

---



---

#### Stay Humble with Your Distinctions

Whatever answers you gave to the previous question should be held with a loose hand. Just as what it means to “act mature” changes with each season of life, what you need to be prepared to take responsibility for may also change with time. Just as the line between exercise and excess changes during the recovery from a surgery, your progress in combatting depression-anxiety will result in you taking ownership for your responses to more areas of your life. If you fail to understand this dynamic it will result in you feeling like people are “moving the goal posts” on you when, in actuality, they are merely recognizing and facilitating your continued growth.

**Read I Corinthians 13:11-12.** Notice how what is acceptable changes at different points in the maturational process. What is true of our physical and spiritual development is also true in our progress through emotional challenges. Notice also that this passage is in “the love chapter.” The implication is that it is unloving not to call people to this kind of maturity in their response to life struggles.

**Question:** What are the aspects of your depression-anxiety for which it is good for you to receive comfort / support now, but for which you should be ready to take personal responsibility later? \_\_\_\_\_

---



---

### Is Hope Worth Disappointment?

This is one of the big narrative questions of depression-anxiety. If hope can result in painful disappointment, is it worth it? In depression-anxiety we see that hope is not just a pleasurable experience, but a source of vulnerability. Hope can exact a toll that we did not expect to pay. While there is only one healthy answer to this question, during depression-anxiety it is normal to consider writing the rest of our life story without such vulnerability.

#### Yes!

Maybe you're not convinced this answer deserves an exclamation point. That is fine at this stage in our journey. But it is important that we understand that “progress” with depression-anxiety will require “trusting hope” again. Hope is a good friend who has given us an uncomfortable message. We were offended and resented hope for a period of time. Even though we may have acknowledged we were wrong about hope, we still must allow ourselves to trust this friend again before things will fully be “made right.”

“Hope involves memory, not only of the past but also a ‘memory’ of the future (p. 88).” Kathryn Greene-McCreight in *Darkness Is My Only Companion*

How does this happen? Like any other relationship. Acknowledge to God your hesitancy to trust hope and allow the tenderness of his response to prove his faithfulness merits your trust. Begin to allow yourself to hope in “small” areas of your life and stretch yourself to hope in increasingly larger areas of your life. Realize that God is willing to take this journey to restored hope with you. God enjoys the journey with us as much as we desire the destination.

**Read Romans 5:1-5.** Don’t feel rushed by this passage. Even if it does not represent where you are, it reveals where God plans to take you. This passage represents the promise that guarantees our answer to the question “is hope worth disappointment” can be “yes!” Notice there is a journey: endurance (we don’t think we can make it) to character (a growing confidence in God’s faithfulness) to hope (a confidence in God’s faithfulness that can become contagious to others) to the removal of shame (our fear and despair no longer carry a sense of stigma, but are a marker of where God’s grace began in our life). Wherever you are on this journey, simply continue to take the next step.

**Question:** What are the next areas where you need to give yourself to hope? What are the big areas of hope for which you can begin to pray and allow to be markers of God’s faithfulness? \_\_\_\_\_

---



---

### What Am I Living For?

Whenever a struggle is prolonged that cause can begin to define our life. The longer we battle depression-anxiety the more we can measure “a good day” exclusively on the basis of these emotions. This can distort how think about life. There are plenty of good things that can happen on a “down” day and plenty of bad things that can happen on an “up” day. Without this larger perspective the story of our life will become eschew in unhealthy ways.

### Purpose More than Relief

Begin by asking yourself the question, “What would make a day ‘good’ even if I experienced significant levels of depression-anxiety?” Having an answer to this question is an important part of de-centering your life off of the presence or absence of depression-anxiety. It allows the possibility of saying, “Today was emotionally hard but good.” This kind of statement can be revolutionizing and emotionally liberating.

“Many Christians who wouldn’t think of viewing God’s word in a false way still make the mistake of viewing God’s world in a false way. As they view themselves, their situations, and their relationships with others, they tend to dwell on and magnify the negatives and exclude the positives. This distorted view of reality inevitably depresses their mood (p. 73).” David Murray in *Christians Get Depressed Too*

As you prepare to begin step seven and turn from narrative to practice, this shift in mindset will be important. If your primary goal is relief from unpleasant emotions, then it is unlikely to maintain the changes that would benefit you. Relief, as a primary goal, is very prone to short-cut solutions.

Instead, we would encourage you to adopt a “life of purpose” as your primary goal. This will be the theme that takes you through the end of step nine in this material. Purpose can both transcend and offset pain. When we are fully vested in God’s purpose for our life, then we are much more able to “for the joy set before us endure our suffering” (cf. Hebrews 12:1-2). Without something in our life more meaningful than relief, depression-anxiety becomes the grand theme of our life.

**Read Philippians 4:10-13.** Notice that Paul does not minimize any of his struggles. He fully admits to having been brought low, hungry, and needy. Having purpose in the midst of depression-anxiety is not a hyper-spiritualized version of denial. Rather, Paul’s sense of purpose as God’s servant gave him the strength to endure any challenge he faced (a more accurate portrayal of verse 13 than its more common triumphalistic interpretations). Paul’s contentment in these challenges (v. 11) was not passivity. Paul continually strove to change his circumstances. Instead, Paul’s contentment was rooted in having a purpose that could not be thwarted by present challenges.

**Question:** What would make a day “good” even if I experienced significant levels of depression-anxiety? Who have you shared this passion with to pray for and encourage you in pursuing it? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Summary Reflection:** As you have worked through this chapter what would you say are the most important aspects of your story that you are beginning to see differently? As you begin to embrace those things as the accurate interpretation of your emotional struggle, how do you anticipate that changing your experience of depression-anxiety?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Encouragement Focus (GOSPEL STORY):**

With each step, we will provide questions you should invite another person to ask you openly so they can know and encourage you in the process of grieving your loss or pain.

- What are the healthy themes of the gospel that you most need to assimilate into how you make sense of your depressive-anxious experience?
- Are you able to identify the specific times in your life when you most need to allow these new interpretations to penetrate your thinking, emotions, and choices?
- How well are you caring for yourself in the ways advised in chapter one?

With each step, we advise you to confide at least one new element of your suffering to your encouragement partner.

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

## Chapter 7

### “Reclaiming My Life from Depression-Anxiety”

IDENTIFY GOALS that allow me to combat the impact of my suffering.

**“I can now see that innocence and powerlessness are not the same thing. I used to think ‘it was not my fault;’ was the same as ‘there is nothing I can do.’ My old suffering story came with an unhealthy way of life. The new story, identity, and beliefs that come with the Gospel allow me to live differently without giving into the old, false shame. I can change [describe how] without a sense of condemnation [describe why].”**

**Memorize:** 1 Peter 3:14-15 (ESV), “But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect.” As you memorize this passage reflect upon these key points:

- “Suffer” – This passage is about responding to suffering in a way that puts our righteousness in Christ on display.
- “Have no fear” – This is not stoicism, but a caution not to let the experience of suffering unsettle us.
- “Honor Christ” – Our ultimate objective in life is still available to us in every situation. We are not powerless.
- “Hope that is in you” – The presence of fear-despair does not mean the absence of hope. Faith is best revealed within the context of fear-despair; just as light is most clearly revealed in the context of darkness.
- “With gentleness and respect” – Often when battling powerful emotions our tone can get away from us.

### Teaching Notes

“At times the medicine feels less like weapons against depression and mania and more like Saul's heavy armor on the young David (p. 69)... Hope. When we are in a state of severe mental illness, hope is far from us. This is why we need the scriptures and the community of faith. They contribute faith and hope to us as from a well we cannot now reach (p. 124).” Kathryn Greene-McCreight in *Darkness Is My Only Companion*

“True inner happiness doesn't involve the absence of pain (p. 10)... We can't control what happens to us... We must decide what we do with what happens to us. This is the most important part of our story. How we choose to respond to our adversity not only reveals our character, it shapes it (p. 200)... Unhappy people are often living in yesterday or wishing for tomorrow (p. 191).” Leslie Vernick in *Lord, I Just Want to Be Happy*

“We're not necessarily doubting that God will do the best for us; were wondering how painful the best will turn out to be (p. 91).” C.S. Lewis in a letter as quoted by Charles Hodges, M.D. in *Good Mood Bad Mood*

“The rule of thumb is that when we find ourselves stuck, we enlarge the circle and include others who can help. This is a way of relying on God and following his means of growth and change (p. 227)... Beauty is just what worrying needs. Worry's magnetic attraction can only be broken by a stronger attraction (p. 154).” Ed Welch in *Running Scared*

“Hope is both a gift from God and a skill he enables us to attain (p. 79).” Ed Welch in *Depression, A Stubborn Darkness*

“You cannot read Matthew 26:36-39 and come away saying, ‘Despondency's not so bad, because Jesus had it in Gethsemane and he's sinless.’ Instead, what you come away with is an impression of how earnestly he fought off the unbelief of despondency. How much more should we (p. 306)!” John Piper in *Future Grace*

## Embedded Study

One of the biggest challenges in identifying goals for combatting the effects of suffering is to be active without accepting false guilt. It is easy to think if there is something I “can do” to offset the impact of my suffering, then it is something I “should have been doing” all along.

The embedded deception in this kind of thinking is that the new strategy would have prevented the experience of depression-anxiety from ever occurring. If this were true, then you would be facing a sin-based experience of depression-anxiety rather than a suffering-based one.

The clearest example of this dynamic might be grief. Grief is clearly a form of suffering. But we are not powerlessly trapped in the experience of grief for a lifetime. There are things we can do to process the experience of grief and offset its impact. However, doing these things earlier would not have prevented our loved one from dying or our experience of grief at their death.

This is how we would encourage you to consider the strategies presented in this chapter. They are approaches to help alleviate the impact of depression-anxiety in your life. We present more strategies than you will be able to implement. Don't get overwhelmed. Choose those that seem like the best fit for your experience. If you're unsure which ones those may be, consult with the friends, pastor, or counselor with whom we've encouraged you to walk through this material.

If you believe that you need an approach to anxiety-depression that calls you take more personal responsibility for your emotional state, then we would encourage you to consult chapter six in the corresponding study that addresses these same emotions from a sin paradigm ([www.bradhambrick.com/depression](http://www.bradhambrick.com/depression)).

Your goal at the end of this chapter, and possibly in conjunction with chapter six of the corresponding study, is to identify the most impactful things you could do in your struggle with depression-anxiety. We want to help you break the sense of powerlessness to which it is so easy to succumb.

Several of these approaches were adapted from a larger list found in Ed Welch's book in *Depression, A Stubborn Darkness* (page 231ff; bold text only).

**1. Talk to Yourself Instead of Listening to Yourself:** Chances are, if you have persisted to this point in the study, your cognitive-momentum was not your friend when you started this study. Hopefully that is changing now. But in difficult situations, you will still likely need to be very intentional with your thoughts.

This discipline is vital for everyone in whatever area of dispositional struggle they have – timidity, pride, people-pleasing, and callousness all call people to “take every thought captive” (2 Cor. 10:5-6) by countering their natural self-talk with those things that are true, just, pure, commendable, etc... (Phil. 4:8).

Don't allow the idea of “talking to yourself” come across as weird. The reality is, the voice in your head speaks to you more than anyone else does. Unless you are intentional with that voice, especially during emotionally difficult times, that voice will echo your flesh more than your Savior.

**Read Psalms 42 and 43.** Notice the repeated question “Why are you cast down, O my soul?” In these two psalms we have an example of what it sounds like talk to ourselves instead of listening to our natural disposition. Notice these psalms do not try to convince themselves that nothing is wrong. Instead, they simply remind themselves of the presence and faithfulness of God in the midst of the struggle.

**2. Stop Saying, “It Won't Work”:** This is likely the biggest effort-killing phrase of all time. When we give in to this mentality, morale is crushed. Unless the proposed strategy is guaranteed to be 100% effective at eliminating 100% of the struggle we think, “It's not worth the effort.” This phrase blinds us to the reality that doing what we're currently doing is 100% effective at eliminating 0% of the struggle.

This form of intended self-protection becomes a cocoon that makes our depression-anxiety feel emotionally safer than any of the risks we would need to take to change. Too often people stay in this cocoon until their situation becomes so severe they are willing to take irrational risks to force quick change. The result is suicide attempts and other desperate measures.

By challenging this statement as false in your own thinking you afford yourself the opportunity to take smaller, educated risks for sustainable, wise change. Being honest with a friend and substance abuse are both “risks” aimed at relief. The more we challenge errant thinking the more likely we are to take wise risks.

**3. Allow for Contributive Causes and Contributive Remedies:** One way we buy into the “it won’t work” mindset is by expecting a single remedy to resolve our entire depressive-anxious experience. It is similar to how we dismissed many of the causes of depression-anxiety in the earlier stages; if a contributive cause was not sufficient to explain the whole of our experience we doubted it could be part of the “reason.”

Rarely will one factor create the totality of our depressive-anxious experience. Consequently, rarely will one intervention provide a complete remedy for our struggle. Failing to recognize this throws us back into the false extremes / all-or-nothing thinking we discussed in chapter three.

As you evaluate potential remedies / interventions, here are the kind of questions we would encourage you to ask:

- **Plausibility:** Is it reasonable to expect this approach to alleviate part of my depressive-anxious struggle?
- **Prioritization:** Are there other approaches that stand to alleviate more of my depressive-anxious struggle?
- **Strategy:** Which will I implement first and for how long to provide an accurate gauge of its effectiveness?
- **Holistic:** Am I willing to consider other approaches that address other causes after I have maximized the relief I can gain from my first strategy?

This approach will help you avoid both false despair and false hope in the process of identifying the goals that best combat the impact of your suffering.

**4. Medication:** There are many questions that exist about the role of medication in the treatment or relief of depression-anxiety. Often when we face questions we’re not sure how to answer – and how many of us are medical researchers – we either become passive (doing nothing) or dependent (doing whatever we’re told).

The question is not whether medications for anxiety-depression are right or wrong. That frames the question as a moral / spiritual question. Rather, the question is whether medication is a wise choice for you in your particular experience of depression-anxiety.

Appendix A is meant to help you walk through this decision making process if you have not already. We hope at this point you can engage this material with a free conscience (resisting the notion that combatting depression-anxiety without medication is the morally superior route) and an open mind (resisting the idea that there is a universal answer to whether medication is good treatment for a given instance of depression-anxiety).

**5. Identify Areas Where Your Choices Matter:** When you can’t control what you want to change most it can easily begin to feel like none of your choices matter. This is another lure into passivity from the experience of depression-anxiety. If you can’t promptly make yourself “feel better,” do any other choices really matter?

The answer is “Yes!” When you no longer believe your choices matter, you have entered a place of ultimate despair. The best way out is not a pep-talk, but to identify those areas of your life where your choices do matter and to embrace the courage necessary to see their significance.

Make a list. What are the top five choices you will make that will impact you and those you love?

- i. \_\_\_\_\_
- ii. \_\_\_\_\_
- iii. \_\_\_\_\_
- iv. \_\_\_\_\_
- v. \_\_\_\_\_

Once you have identified key choices that matter, don’t allow them to become overwhelmed by the number of other choices you have to make every day. It is as easy to become paralyzed as it is to feel meaningless when we think about our day-to-day choices from the midst of depression-anxiety.

**Read Matthew 6:25-34.** In light of this reflection, consider the way obeying this passage requires us to think about choices. We must believe our choices matter enough to “seek first” God’s kingdom (v. 33) and weigh the significance of our choices in order not to be overwhelmed by daily obligations. A great way to maintain this balance is to prioritize your most important choices, remind yourself of God’s grace that you can have influence in those areas, and call yourself to actively trust God with the other areas you’ve deemed “less important.”

**6. Engage Relationships:** Don’t do depression-anxiety alone. It’s dangerous and there should be a warning label; if emotions had a place to put warning labels. It has been the goal of the seminar to this point to give you the tools to invite other people to share your burden.

- If you struggled with a sense of stigma, hopefully you’ve learned these are common emotions.
- If you struggled with what to say, hopefully you’ve found many ways to put yourself in words.
- If you struggled with pride, hopefully you’ve gained a willingness to acknowledge your limitations.
- If you struggled with insecurity, hopefully you’ve seen the pride in your unwillingness to be weak.
- If you cling to your independence from others, hopefully you’ve seen the futility in this pursuit.

Often it is our sin that prevents us from receiving God’s comfort in our suffering. Our sin-nature will capitalize on suffering to reinforce its defenses against God’s grace. This is not a bait-and-switch. Our depression-anxiety can have its roots in suffering, but still be high-jacked by sin.

One of the key indicators that this has happened is isolation. God calls us to live in relationship. It is impossible to be the person God calls us to be unless we are meaningfully involved in the life of others and allowing others to be meaningfully involved in our own life.

How do we make sure that the involvement of others in our lives is healthy for them and us? The next three points address that question.

**7. Ask People to Pray for Goals More than Relief:** This is a great way to ensure that your friend’s involvement in your life is reinforcing the changes that God is producing. Examples of these kinds of prayer requests would be:

- Pray that I would consistently take my thoughts captive when I experience depression-anxiety
- Pray that I would be disciplined in my diet, exercise, and sleep patterns
- Pray that I would face each occurrence of depression-anxiety as an opportunity to trust God
- Pray that I would not allow my emotional pain to create doubt about God’s love
- Pray that I be honest with you about my life so I don’t feel alone even in our friendship
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

In the blanks above write additional goals that would be most important for your friends to ask God for on your behalf.

In the blanks below, write the names of people who you could ask to pray for you in these ways.

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

These types of prayer requests should lead to the next way of engaging relationships.

**8. Be Willing to Be Challenged:** Asking for prayer in these ways without the willingness to be challenged would be a form of hypocrisy. While it may seem intimidating, at this point you should want this type of accountability. Consider the alternative; the primary voice in your world would be your depression-anxiety. That has been miserable. Don’t turn back now. Allow others to love you in the other direction.

Often it is our sense of emotional fragility that generates a contagious passivity. We begin to believe that the basic expectations of life are “too much” and the intensity of our emotions convinces others we’re right. Trying to be loving they do for us what we should do for ourselves. In the end, there is a collective expectation of our non-activity that remains in place until our caregivers become exhausted and distance themselves (usually perceived as abandonment).

Unless we allow others to challenge us in the areas our struggles tempt us to neglect, our relationships become unsustainable. We go through cycles of dependence, exhaustion, conflict, and isolation. We do this until we “learn” that relationships are undependable. Actually, what we learned was that one-sided relationships are unsustainable. Allowing ourselves to be challenges is what breathes the hope of longevity into relationships.

**9. Serve Others:** How do we show people that a relationship can be balanced? We serve them with joy. We get to know them and their struggles in a way that allows us to identify ways to bless them in the midst of the challenges that they’re facing.

How do we keep our own struggles in perspective? One way is that we give weight to the struggles of others. A primary focus on our struggles always makes them seem more significant. When we begin to neglect serving others, we no longer hear phrases like: “thank you...,” “I miss you...,” and “you make my life better...”

The absence of these kinds of interactions makes life seem less meaningful; which only makes depression-anxiety worse. But when all we hear is the silence; we often fail to recognize it may be rooted in our void of serving others.

**Read Acts 20:35.** “Blessed” is a good description of the opposite of depression-anxiety. It means more than episodic happiness. “Blessed” includes the idea of a rich, full life marked by contentment and satisfaction. Jesus said that the way to be “blessed” is marked more by giving, that includes serving, than by receiving. We are able to give to others when we remember how much we’ve been given in Christ (Gen. 12: 2). We are never grace-strapped. Generosity in our love is a primary way of reminding ourselves of the grandiosity of God’s love; by loving we realize we are drawing from a never-ending supply.

**10. Forgive:** It is easy to forget that the context of the command to forgive is always suffering; being sinned against. This means forgiveness is often a vital part of overcoming suffering-based depression-anxiety, but does not mean God’s cares more about our response to pain than he does to our experience of pain.

In God’s call for you to forgive others is his desire for your freedom and relief. If you only sense the moral weight of God’s command to forgive and miss God’s compassion in this command, the sense of unfairness will tempt you resist this source of relief.

If there is a significant relationship in which forgiveness is needed in order for you to have emotional freedom, then consider these resources for guidance:

- For difficulty understanding what forgiveness is and how to navigate the emotional journey of experiencing its benefits, consider unit six in [www.bradhambrick.com/gcmcommunication](http://www.bradhambrick.com/gcmcommunication).
- For difficulty understanding the implications of forgiveness in a past, abusive-traumatic relationship that is generating current emotional struggles, consider [www.bradhambrick.com/sexualabuse](http://www.bradhambrick.com/sexualabuse).
- For difficulty understanding the role of forgiveness and necessary limits in a current unhealthy or manipulative relationship, consider [www.bradhambrick.com/selfcenteredspouse](http://www.bradhambrick.com/selfcenteredspouse).

Forgiveness can be a journey more than a decision. But, even in those difficult circumstances, it is a journey towards freedom that is worth the effort. If resentment is what traps you in depression-anxiety and confounds the quality of your present relationships, trust God enough to embark on this journey.

**Read II Corinthians 2:10-11.** There are many things that may be confusing about this passage. We may marvel or question Paul’s willingness to vicariously forgive. But we learn one thing clearly; Satan has a set of strategies (yes, plural) for using unforgiveness to further destroy those who have already been hurt. Like a predator preying on the wounded in a flock, Satan seizes upon these spiritual vulnerabilities (I Peter 5:8). This does not need to cause us to fear. God is greater than our adversary (I John 4:4), but it should cause us to fervently seek to understand what it looks like to be free from the desire for the demise of those who have hurt us.

**11. Shield Against a Depressed-Anxious Identity:** The longer we struggle with anything the more that struggles tends to become part of our identity. Paul Tripp captures this dynamic well:

“In fact, the longer we struggle with a problem, the more likely we are to define ourselves by that problem (divorced, addicted, depressed, co-dependent, ADD). We come to believe that our problem is who we are. But while these labels may describe particular ways we struggle as sinners [or sufferers] in a fallen world, they are not our identity! If we allow them to define us, we will live trapped within their boundaries. This is no way for a child of God to live (p. 260)!” in *Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hand*

You are not your struggle. There is a “you” that experiences your struggle. If this were not true you would not be aware of the struggle, because struggles don’t have self-awareness. You won’t philosophize your way out of depression-anxiety, but you can begin to clearly see the error in this very ensnaring belief.

One way to reinforce this distinction is to change your language from “I am depressed-anxious” to “I am experiencing depression-anxiety.” It may sound like semantics, but it begins to cognitively separate you from your experience. It is a habit, whose verbal awkwardness, will force you to consider the point – you are not your struggle.

If you have a general struggle to have a positive, satisfying sense of identity, then consider the seminar “Finding Your Confidence, Identity, and Security in Christ” at [www.bradhambrick.com/identity](http://www.bradhambrick.com/identity). This seminar looks at how the gospel provides a satisfying and compelling sense of identity, purpose, security, confidence, and wisdom for every believer.

**Read I Peter 4:9-10.** Make a list of everything this passage says you are in Christ. Compare this to the sense of identity that has emerged from a prolonged struggle with depression-anxiety. Now ask yourself these two questions. First, which of these sources of identity was true first (Eph. 1:4)? Second, which of these sources of identity will be true longest (Rom. 8:31-39)? Remember, God has compassion for where you are in the middle of your journey as you cling to these realities.

- 12. **Worship:** Depression-anxiety is a form of awe. In these difficult emotions we are awed at things that seem overwhelming and against us. Christian worship is also a form of awe. When we worship God we remind ourselves of the overwhelming reality that God is for us and with us.

In this sense, worship and depression-anxiety are competing narratives trying to define what is most true about our lives. Worship doesn’t make your stresses untrue (any more than depression-anxiety makes your blessings untrue), but it does allow your stresses to become the subplot of your life instead of the main story.

“But isn’t it hypocritical to worship when my stresses have usurped the gospel as the main story of my life?” many people sincerely ask. It is only hypocritical if you try to lie to God, yourself, or others about this inner battle as you worship your way back to allowing the gospel narrative to have primacy in your emotions.

For this reason, you are encouraged to attend corporate worship gatherings even if you doubt your emotions will fully participate. As you stand in a mass of people singing about the gospel, remember every person present is singing because their story is your story. We sing the same songs together because we are living and celebrating the same redemptive story.

Use this realization to give you a new entry point into worship. If you struggle to enter through your own emotional experience, hear the joy of others on the same journey and begin by echoing their joy. Realize they are “like you” and walking with you. You may not feel the movement, but realize you are in the current of their worship because your story is part of theirs.

As you continue to move forward, remember that worship is good depression-anxiety prevention because it cements the gospel as the main story of our lives and allows our stresses to have their right weight as secondary or tertiary subplots in our lives.

What are the forms of worship that you find most meaningful, satisfying, or emotionally stirring? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What are points in your day where you can incorporate worship to incorporate more “healthy awe”? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Are there aspects of your depressive-anxious experience that are more easily or clearly impacted by worship?

---

---

**13. Realize This Is a Battle and You Must Fight:** Even suffering is a battle. It may be more natural to think of our battle against sin. In which case we want to eliminate something, and it is clear we bear the responsibility to do so. But when told to fight in our struggle against suffering, we can begin to feel falsely accused and that those who remind us of this are being mean.

Yet the alternative is passivity and surrender. As unfair as it may be, when your depression-anxiety may be rooted in suffering you must still engage the battle. To stop fighting for hope and peace is to stop living. Even without considering suicide, we can exist as the living-dead if we are not striving for hope.

What does this battle look like? Probably much more mundane than you imagine. It can be as simple as savoring a cup of coffee, laughing in a conversation with a friend, praying with the faith God is listening, or anything else listed in this chapter. The battle for hope is usually not as grandiose as the experience of depression-anxiety is dark.

God has already won the victory so we do not have to be valiant warriors armed like comic book heroes. We get to be God’s children who walk out, under his protection, the victory he has already won. It is often forgetting this reality that makes fighting that battle at hand seem so overwhelming that we give up.

**Read I Peter 1:3-9.** First Peter is the New Testament book that focuses most on suffering. In many ways it is the New Testament sequel to Job in the Old Testament. In these introductory verses Peter is describing what it means to continue to “fight for hope” in the midst of suffering. Notice the sense of journey in this passage – it walks from salvation through suffering to heaven. Consider memorizing this passage so you can call it to mind when you no longer feel like trying.

**14. Let Go of “Should”:** A frequent driver of suffering-based depression-anxiety is an exaggerated sense of what you “should” be doing. Any number of scenarios can contribute to this:

- The person with chronic pain who feels like he should do all he could do if here were fully healthy.
- The new mom who thinks she should do all she could do before she was caring for an infant.
- The person who retires and feels like she should be able to be as generous as when she was working.
- The adult who begins caring for his ailing parents and feels he should still have the capacity he did before.
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

In these situations, combatting the impact of suffering requires acknowledging your new limits; whether those limits be time, energy, or finances. Otherwise a false sense of guilt will either become a burden that fuels depression or the impetus for foolish decisions that creates anxiety.

What are the limits you are currently facing and the “should’s” that are tempted to accompany them?

---

---

---

What are the realistic expectations that you believe God has for someone in those circumstances?

---

---

---

If you struggle to live within your time-energy limits, consider the resource at [www.bradhambrick.com/burnout](http://www.bradhambrick.com/burnout). If you struggle to live within your financial limits, consider the resource at [www.bradhambrick.com/gcmfinances](http://www.bradhambrick.com/gcmfinances).

**15. Question Your Interpretations:** We tend to see first what we fear most. Consider the child who fears snakes walking through the woods. What is every crooked stick on the ground until it proves otherwise? A snake! The same is true in the way we make meaning of our world.

- For the person who fears rejection, what is heard in every question?
- For the person who fears failure, what is perceived in every opportunity?
- For the person who fears poverty, what is seen in every expenditure?
- For the person who fears condemnation, what is felt in every unclear choice?

You get the idea. We read our fears into every situation. This fuels the depression-anxiety cycle. Initially we are stirred up by the sense of threat. But we cannot live in this emotionally amped state so we crash into depression. Once we've pseudo-rested in this depression we are able to rev back up to being anxious.

Notice the verb in this strategy. It is merely to question, not necessarily to fully refute. Doubt is all the friend we need in this battle. When we can separate ourselves enough from the interpretations which fuel our anxiety-depression enough to doubt them, the battle is largely won. Truth has its entry point and, once the light of truth has a crack through which to enter, the shadowy lies dissipate.

**Read John 8:31-32.** Often we forget that the first part of believing truth is having the courage to doubt the alternative lies that seem so appealing. Doubting our fears is the first step towards trusting God. In the same way we cannot serve two masters (Matt. 6:24), we cannot listen to two voices or live in two stories. In suffering, Satan does not take us into slavery by moral bondage (like he does with sin), but by an unyielding allegiance to our fears. Doubting your fears is a form of faith that allows God's truth to set you free.

- 16. Look for the Good in People / Situations:** Depression and anxiety are a set of dark lenses that make threats and problems stand out in bold relief. These same lenses take blessings and opportunities and set them in the background of our emotional vision. As long as this dynamic exists depression-anxiety will have the home-field advantage in our thoughts and emotions.

The counter measure is to intentionally discipline yourself to look for what is good in people or situations. This doesn't mean you cannot acknowledge challenges that exist, but you do need to discipline yourself that these things are not what you see first or dwell on most.

You are in charge of what you think. Let that statement sink in. You may not be directly in charge of what you feel, but can be directly in charge of what you think; and what you think has a very large influence on what you feel. You should feel empowered by this reality. You are not helpless with your experience of depression-anxiety. Depression-anxiety exists in a domain over which you have jurisdiction – the power to make changes.

Consider being dismayed about the content of a television show while you're holding the remote control, have the freedom to listen to the radio, or go for a walk. This is how you should think about the fearful-despairing content of your depressive-anxious thinking. You have alternative choices regarding your mental “air time.”

**Read Philippians 4:8.** It is one thing to know that you can “change the channel” but it is another thing to have a listing of good shows that are currently on other channels. In this verse, Paul is providing a listing of the other programs to which we are to direct our thoughts. These are the things you are to look for and direct your minds towards when you are anxious or depressed. Memorize this passage and use it as a scavenger hunt list when you feel the dark lenses of depression-anxiety coming over your thinking.

- 17. Read a Good Book on Suffering:** When amateurs compete against professionals, the professionals usually win. Satan is an expert at using suffering to derail people's lives. He takes that pain (physical, emotional, relational, and spiritual) and uses it to create a sense of powerlessness and cynicism.

Unfortunately, most Christians are better at applying the gospel to sin than to suffering. Hopefully this material has helped to balance your ability to bring the gospel to bear on suffering. But if you still feel imbalanced in your ability to process the experience of suffering in light of the gospel, continue your study. The mere willingness to study and learn shows an active posture that counters Satan's intent to mire you down in these emotions.

Here are several books to consider. Read on-line reviews of those that interest you to determine which book addresses the kinds of questions you're asking.

- *A Place of Healing: Wrestling with the Mysteries of Suffering, Pain and God's Sovereignty* by Joni Eareckson Tada
- *Walking with God Through Pain and Suffering* by Tim Keller
- *How Long O Lord?* by D.A. Carson

- *The Problem of Pain* by C.S. Lewis
- *Depression: A Stubborn Darkness* by Ed Welch
- *Shame Interrupted: How God Lifts the Pain of Worthlessness & Rejection* by Ed Welch
- *Glorious Ruin: How Suffering Sets You Free* by Tullian Tchividjian

**18. Be Willing to Sacrifice the Pseudo-Comforts of Depression-Anxiety:** It can be hard to admit the ways we take comfort in our depression-anxiety. Believing the lies of our fears makes us feel “safe” that we’ll never be caught off-guard by a calamity. Settling into the passivity of depression creates a cocoon from “risks” of relationship and the possibility of failing.

Make a list of the types of pseudo-comforts you receive from the experience of depression-anxiety.

---



---



---

In order to know hope, peace, and joy we will have to be willing to sacrifice these pseudo-comforts. We call them “pseudo-comforts” because that fact that we dislike the experience of depression-anxiety reveals they bring more pain than relief.

Yet the term sacrifice should be understood with all the violent imagery its original meaning implies. You will have to be willing to kill these benefits. Remember, this sacrifice is the equivalent of closing a business that is losing money. It is a wise, net-win choice; but your history with these benefits will still make wisdom initially painful.

**Read John 12:20-26.** In this passage Jesus says his death-for-life exchange (v. 23-24) is the example of what it will look like for us to live out the gospel in our lives (v. 25). Sacrificing pseudo-comforts is trading death – beliefs and practices that weigh you down – for life – the opportunity know peace and joy in a way previously hindered. On the backside of this exchange it will seem like a “no brainer,” however, each time you face this decision about a pseudo-comfort it will take faith in this promise in order to resist temptation to fall back into the old pattern.

**19. Don’t Confuse Boredom with Depression or Uncertainty with Anxiety:** When depression-anxiety has been an extended part of our experience we become emotionally gun-shy; any unpleasant emotion makes us wonder if we’re about to slip “back there” again. The surge of fear and dread this triggers is enough to push us back into depression-anxiety even if that was not going to be the outcome of the initial emotional experience.

You can be uncertain but not anxious. You can be bored but not depressed. “Normal sadness” and “normal uncertainty” are a part of a “normal life.” When your spouse is running late, wondering if they’re alright is normal. Feeling bored with repetitive dinner or entertainment options is normal. Don’t allow these kinds of experience to lure you into thinking you’ve “relapsed.”

Here are the indicators that you would need to be concerned about recurrences of depression-anxiety.

- You begin to isolate yourself from the relationships you’ve developed during this study.
- You begin to neglect basic responsibilities of caring for yourself, family, friends, or work.
- The destructive themes of your suffering story (step four) become prominent in your thinking again.

Unless these characteristics are present in your experience of depression-anxiety, then do not alter your life. Continue to enact the key practices / principles you learned in this study and pursue the things that are important to you. Keeping your momentum moving forward is more important than examining the emotional experience unless the qualities above are present.

**20. Spiritual Life – Less May Be More:** A large part of the Christian life is supposed to be peace and joy (Gal. 5:22-23). When depression-anxiety mutes these emotions, then it is easy to think that we are living in defeat more than victory. This easily creates a standard by which we feel perpetually condemned.

So we must ask, “Peace and joy as compared to what standard?” If we simply say “more peace and joy than I have now,” then anything short of a manic-high is defeat. If we say “more peace and joy than the average person,” 49% of

the population will always be living in defeat. If we say “more peace and joy than I deserve,” then anything North of literal Hell is victory; whether it’s satisfying or not.

The answer can only be “more peace and joy than I would have without Christ in this moment.” This is the standard that allows us to walk through hard times without feeling like “there must be something wrong with me.” The Christian life has the buoyancy to withstand the ups and downs of life rather than a hard-and-fast emotional standard that crushes us during difficult seasons.

What does this look like practically? Likely it looks like the willingness to savor simple pleasures, being willing to remain honest with God and others about our experience, and holding on to our faith in God’s ability to redeem the hardships we are facing. When we are willing to consider these “lesser victories” as “significant wins” then we will find our faith is much deeper and our quality of life much richer than we ever expected it could be based upon such “small” changes.

### The End Game of Depression-Anxiety as Suffering

What does it mean to successfully “combat the impact of suffering”? It does not mean the total removal of any residual suffering experience. We wish that was the case. We wish if we did what we could do, then depression-anxiety would no longer be a part of our emotional experience.

But there is danger that comes with that kind of dreaming. It is the danger of false expectation that results in a false sense of guilt and failure when the experience of depression-anxiety returns. If we believe in an earthly existence without the experience of depression or anxiety, then when we feel these emotions one of two things has to be true: (1) we failed God, or (2) God failed us.

Instead, when our anxiety-depression is rooted in suffering, then our goal is to balance two mentalities.

1. *Accept* that depression-anxiety will be part of our experience without succumbing to a sense of failure or shame.
2. *Commit* to living out a healthy, God-honoring response to our experience of depression anxiety.

For suffering-based anxiety-depression this is what it means to walk in victory. Consider, as a parallel, what it would mean to honor God in the midst of chronic pain, another suffering-based struggle. Would it mean the absence of pain? Would it mean the absence of discouragement about that pain? No and no.

It would mean learning to *accept* that pain, of varying intensities, would be a part of your life and *committing* to live in wise, God-honoring ways in light of that pain. As you learned these two basic responses, then you would have the opportunity to live out the purposes God has for your life. Neither the presence of pain nor discouragement over that pain prevents you from experiencing God’s full favor or living out his purpose for your life.

The same is true for the experience of depression-anxiety rooted in suffering. The purpose of this chapter was to provide you with an arsenal of strategies you can leverage as you become more skilled at living out your *commitment* to enact wise, God-honoring responses to your depression-anxiety.

#### Encouragement Focus (IDENTIFY GOALS):

With each step, we will provide questions you should invite another person to ask you openly so they can know and encourage you in the process of grieving your loss or pain.

- Which of these strategies do you believe are most important for combatting the impact of your suffering?
- What pseudo-comforts of depression-anxiety will be hardest for you to sacrifice?
- What aspect of the “accept” and “commit” dynamic will be hardest for you to enact?

With each step, we advise you to confide at least one new element of your suffering to your encouragement partner.

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

## Chapter 8

### “When the Road Becomes Long More Than Steep”

PERSEVERE in the new life and identity to which God has called me.

**“Some of the pain related to depression-anxiety remains [describe] but it defines me less.**

**I am also experiencing more of what God has for me.**

**I never knew life could include [list of experiences] again.**

**I see now that God was not withholding these things from me, nor were they forfeited.**

**I am learning to enjoy them without shame, fear, or guardedness.**

**I have come to realize that ‘healthy’ means more than the absence of depression-anxiety.**

**I am learning to trust and enjoy God in the rise and fall of my circumstances.”**

**Memorize:** Romans 5:3-5 (ESV), “More than that, we rejoice in our suffering, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through this Holy Spirit who has been given to us.” As you memorize this passage reflect upon these key points:

- “Rejoice” – If you read the passage carefully, you’ll see we rejoice in the fruit of suffering; not the pain.
- “Endurance... character... hope” – Hopefully this captures well the journey you have been on in this study.
- “Shame” – God is faithful not only to redeem the suffering but remove the shame associated with suffering.
- “God’s love” – The perfect love of a perfect God enables us to live with painful emotions in an imperfect world.
- “Holy Spirit” – This seal (2 Cor. 1:22) of God’s permanent covenant provides us of assurance of his presence.

#### Teaching Notes

“Lasting change doesn’t occur in leaps, but in tiny and faithful steps. Small changes can make a big difference (p. 15)... Sometimes the pain of change makes us forget our former misery, and we revert to previous habits to feel better (p. 156).”  
Leslie Vernick in *Lord, I Just Want to Be Happy*

“One of the greatest catalyst to our pain was the sense that we were alone. Because we suffered mostly silently, we didn’t find other people who were suffering in the same way. And because those other suffering people were silent to, we all thought we were the only ones (p. 33).” Amy Simpson in *Troubled Minds*

“You are secure not because you have control or understanding. You are secure even though you are weak, imperfect, and shortsighted. You are secure for one reason and one reason alone: God exists and he is your Father (p. 31)... The temptation, in times of waiting, is to focus on the things we are waiting for, all the obstacles that are in the way, our inability to make it happen, and all of the other people who haven’t seemed to have had to wait... All of this increases our feeling of helplessness, our tendency to think our situation is hopeless, and our judgment that waiting is futile (p. 48).” Paul Tripp in *A Shelter in the Time of Storm*.

“I think that people who have not dealt with such grief, either first or secondhand, simply do not know what happiness is, what joy is, because they do not know what the depths of pain can be. It is like this: you cannot know the import of the cross and resurrection unless you have grasped the weight of sin... That is, sometimes depression can be a blessing, because one can learn about God through his hiding (p. 28).” Kathryn Greene-McCreight in *Darkness Is My Only Companion*

## Embedded Study

New and normal are words that do not belong together. But that is precisely what step eight is all about, establishing a new normal. If we were grieving the loss of a loved one, we might resist the idea of a new normal. If we were processing a betrayal, we might prefer “things be like they were before the infidelity.” But with anxiety-depression, the tendency is often more cynicism and doubt than resistance.

Depression-anxiety made “normal” feel painful for so long we wonder if “normal” can be good.

Even if you are optimistic about this new normal, a new normal is scary. It is unknown. It sounds so permanent. It soon will be the part of your life that occurs whether you’re intentional about shaping it or not. But if you are intimidated by this step, do not let that convince you that you have not completed the prior steps adequately.

The phrase “new normal” seems to imply more intentionality than it actually requires. You do not need a spreadsheet with seven columns and twenty-four rows to itemize and color-code. As you live wisely, a new-healthy normal will happen. This chapter will be devoted to identifying the defining marks of this new normal so you can be comforted as this occurs.

The chapter will also include two other sections. First, we will look at how this new normal assimilates into your life story. This will be a place for you to summarize what you learned and how you have grown over the course of this study. You will seek to combine the narrative you built in steps four through six with the practices you implemented in steps seven.

Second, guidance will be provided to help you think through how to prepare to transition from your current formal helping relationship (i.e., support group, counseling relationship, or mentor relationship) into general small group ministry of your church for continued encouragement and growth. You are about to enter a new season of transition: from healing to living.

## Marks of a New Normal

The marks below are not portraits of what your new normal will look like. Each life is unique, so trying to create a list that would capture the new normal of every person would be impossible. Rather, the marks below capture the emotional, relational, and spiritual development that should be occurring as a healthy new normal emerges.

Many of these points are modified and adapted from H. Norman Wright’s book *Experiencing Grief* (bold text only, pages 79-80). At this stage in the process, overcoming depression-anxiety and processing grief are similar. Both involve beginning a new season of life with the absence of something or someone that has been a central figure.

As you read through this list, do not view it as a to-do list. That would be the equivalent of a teenager reading about puberty as something he/she must accomplish. As you live wisely, you will find these things happening in your life.

Begin by marking with an asterisk ( \* ) those items that you have already seen occurring during your journey. Allow this to encourage you about God’s faithfulness and give you confidence that those things that have not yet emerged will do so. Pray for those things that have not yet emerged and, each time one of these qualities does emerge, celebrate it as another fulfillment of God’s promise (Philippians 1:6).

1. **Treasuring the Lessons You’ve Learned from Depression-Anxiety:** Pain is excellent at distracting us from value. You do not have to say that the lessons you learned are the “reason” God allowed you to experience depression-anxiety in order to see the value in what God has done on the journey. Doubtless you are stronger in many ways; your spiritual-emotional endurance muscles have been stretched. How could you not be a more compassionate person towards those whose life-struggles are hard to articulate, see, or overcome? You’ve learned a great deal about yourself and what it means to have faith in hard seasons of life.

“I would go into the deeps a hundred times to cheer a downcast spirit, that I might know how to speak a word in season to the weary (p. 146).” Charles Haddon Spurgeon in *The Soul Winner*

**Read James 1:2-4.** Your experience of depression-anxiety qualifies as what James calls “various trials” (v. 2). How do we count it joy? Not by volunteering to do it again as soon as possible, but by giving the lessons we’ve learned as much emotional weight as the trial we endured. One does not have to be minimized to value the other. The lessons we learned and the character we developed are part, not the whole, of what God uses to bring us to the point of being “complete” (v. 4).

2. **Energy Level Returns to Normal:** For so long life felt foreign. Everything required effort, thought, and intentionality. Decisions felt overwhelming. Conversations were intimidating, superficial, or awkward. Sleep was hard, interrupted, or an escape. That is an exhausting way to live. With the establishment of a new normal you are coming out of that way of life. Rest can be rest again. Rejoice in this as an indicator of God’s faithfulness on this journey.

**Read Isaiah 40:27-31.** You have likely felt disregarded by God (v. 27) and this added to the exhaustion (v. 30), but you have waited faithfully for God and are experiencing His renewal (v. 31). It is after experiences like depression-anxiety that we realize how much our energy level is a gift from God. We so often take it for granted as “ours” but even in our prime (v. 30) we can be wasted away by life without God.

3. **Decision Making Becomes Easier:** Decisions are not simply made on the basis of principles. Decisions are influenced by mood, level of hope, sense of desperation, longevity of our current perspective (i.e., immediate relief vs. long-term benefit), and other dispositional variables influenced by depression-anxiety. We can sense this impact and often become hesitant to make decisions; at least until decisions pile up and then we may become erratic-impulsive. The journey through this material should have helped you not only sort through your emotions, but your life as whole, so that decision making can become more intentional and targeted.

**Read Isaiah 46:3-4.** It is in the reality of this passage that clear and wise decision making exists. During the experience of depression-anxiety we gain a first person experience of God’s promises, “I will carry you... I will bear... I will save (v. 4)” and realize how much this has been happening since our birth (v. 3). An abiding awareness of God’s care and guidance provides the foundation for good decision making. We no longer feel compelled to over-compensate in our striving for these things that are already ours in Christ. Further, having come to this knowledge through suffering, we know ourselves better and are able to make decisions more clearly within the passions with which God created us (Psalm 37:4).

4. **Appetite and Sleep Cycle Return to Normal:** One of the main ways depression-anxiety makes itself at home in our lives is by creating a sense of chaos. One of the indicators depression-anxiety is abating is a return of rhythm. While you may never be (or want to be) an “organized-scheduled person,” having biological rhythms of sleep and metabolism (key influencers on the body’s energy levels) are important factors in emotional regulation. When your body knows when it will receive rest and appropriate nutritional supplies it can be much more of an ally in your resistance of depression-anxiety.

**Read Psalm 4:6-8.** During depression-anxiety we are the ones who asked the question of verse 6. Now we bear the testimony of verses 7 and 8. We see that enjoying a good meal and the ability to enjoy good sleep are very God-dependent blessings. We now can savor them for what they were meant to be all along. Verses 7 and 8 would be good passages to memorize and use in your prayers before meals and before bed.

5. **Able to Enjoy Time Alone:** Solitude has long been recognized as an important discipline in the life of a Christian (see Richard Foster’s *Celebration of Discipline* chapter 7, pages 96-109). During depression-anxiety being alone with one’s thoughts can be a frightening experience. At this stage the gift of solitude is returned to us as a blessing and we are better able to treasure this gift for the blessing it is. If you have struggled with being alone even before your depressive-anxious experience, then consider reading Richard Foster’s chapter on solitude. It contains several pages reflecting on the benefits of solitude during a “dark night of the soul.”

**Read passages about Jesus and solitude:** Matthew 4:1-11, 14:13 and 23, 17:1-9, 26:36-46; Mark 1:35, 6:31; Luke 5:16, 6:12. In His full humanity, Jesus regularly sought solitude as a source of strength. How much more would we need to do the same? It is during this time of establishing a new normal that it would be wise to evaluate how healthy and balanced your practice of spiritual disciplines are. It may be a while before life is as moldable again. If you are unsure what this would look like, then either Foster’s book or Donald Whitney’s *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* would be very a useful read.

6. **Begin Looking Forward to Events:** While battling depression-anxiety you likely had to remain tenaciously rooted in the present. Regret over the past or uncertainty about the future were strong emotional triggers. But an indicator that you are entering a new phase with your depression anxiety is the ability to learn from your past (which assumes some regrettable mistakes) in order to prepare for the future (planning is different from spinning). Now when you look to the future with intentionality and then believe that your choices can influence it for the better, you can do so with anticipation instead of dread or fear.

**Read Philippians 3:12-16.** This passage is often misapplied for depression-anxiety. Paul is not laying out a principle of forgetting the past or living in denial about painful events. In Philippians 4:9 Paul asks this church to remember how he handled his unpleasant experiences of anxiety while with them. In Philippians 4:12 Paul remembers being “brought low” and being hungry or in need. The principle is simply that the pain of our past should not become a mental block to pursuing the mission of our future. At this stage in the process you should begin to sense that turning of perspective within your own heart.

7. **Able to Use Your Experience to Comfort Others:** Initially, sharing the load of someone else’s depression-anxiety might have only served to magnify our own. When our depression-anxiety is strong, we can become pain-saturated. Our goal, at that time, is to process our own experience wisely. At this stage you will experience God’s comfort in a way that begins to make the challenges of others less threatening. You can relate to their pain and have a real sense of empathy to let them know God will not allow them to drown in their sorrow. You do not have answers for all their questions—their experience likely has features yours did not—but you have a testimony about the Shepherd of their journey and what it was like for us to walk with Him on your journey.

**Read 2 Corinthians 1:3-5.** Notice the time lapse implied in this passage. God comforts us. He is our Father of mercies and God of all comfort in any affliction we face. Pause, with no time table for how long this part of the process lasts. So that we can testify to God’s comfort to others in whatever affliction they face. The pause is essential to the comfort. If we think God has put us “on the clock” to get “a return on His comfort investment” in us, then we would not feel like we had much comfort to offer. Once we experience God’s patience before the “so that” (v. 4) we begin to share abundantly in Christ’s comfort (v. 5).

8. **Freedom to Worship Returns:** During depression-anxiety worship can feel like a charade; the epitome of hypocrisy. The joy implied in the word worship only seemed like a reminder of what you didn’t have. As the gospel story becomes the foundation for our new normal, we realize our depression-anxiety reminded of the general hopelessness of the human condition. In worship we begin to celebrate that there is hope for the emotional chasm we experienced to be closed. We realize afresh that we only experience emotional darkness as darkness because God made us to experience the full joy of his presence; we only find repelling those things that are contrary to our created design.

**Read Psalm 13.** This Psalm traces the journey of many in emotional turmoil from when worship is hard and painful (v. 1-4) to when it becomes a source of joy and strength again (v. 5-6). Be reminded that God put this Psalm in His Word to comfort you where you are on this journey. It is the psalmist’s reflection upon his salvation (v. 5) which allows him to sing and see that God has dealt bountifully with him (v. 6). This is because it is the gospel where we see God more than agreeing with our dissatisfaction with the depression-anxiety that emanates from the Fall and bringing an ultimate remedy to the ravages of sin in our world.

9. **Sense of Humor Returns:** Proverbs 14:13 can be the testimony of many, “Even in laughter the heart may ache, and the end of joy may be grief.” We feel like depression-anxiety made our laughter hollow or “just polite.” Humor is built upon irony and proportionality. Depression-anxiety tends to flatten or over-inflate the meaning of everything to the point that humor dies. But we serve a God who used joy as His motivation to conquer death (Heb. 12:2). Our God truly gets the last laugh (Psalms 2:4) and our laughter can echo His victory. Without the gospel any laughter would be a form of denial. In light of the gospel, our pain becomes what is temporary (2 Cor. 3:16-18) and our joy is eternal. The return of our sense of humor then becomes an expression of healthy faith rather than an unhealthy distraction.

**Read Psalm 30:5.** God does not use his victory as a reason to forbid our sorrow. God is not a temperamental, insecure king who only allows happy people in His presence. God allows us to mature—not only in character, but also in our emotions—into what He has made for us to be. We find repeatedly in Scripture that God did not become impatient with our depression-anxiety just because He conquered sin and death.

10. **New Relationships are Built:** It is hard to build new relationships while you’re in the thick of the battle with depression-anxiety. Your choices do not seem fair: be honest and allow your emotions to be at the forefront of your friendship, or be fake and allow the relationship to build in a way that seems disingenuous. However, at this stage, you should begin to feel like you are in control enough that two things can happen: (1) you are emotionally free enough to show genuine interest in others without it being a form of escape, and (2) you have a sense of who you are that is separate enough from your experience of depression-anxiety that these emotions can be introduced into the relationship when it is natural and allows for appropriate encouragement-support.

**Read Proverbs 27:9.** This proverb connects new friendships with the presence of joy. It also connects the sweetness of friendship with “earnest counsel.” This is the balance you should be seeing in your new relationships. The relationships are sparked by mutual interests that create a set of connection. But the relationships are also vulnerable enough that each of you are able to speak into the other’s areas of struggle. Hopefully the authenticity you learned walking through this material with a mentor or counselor provided an example of how good these kinds of relationships can be.

**11. Experience Peace Even During an “Emotional Low”:** Often the near panic that comes with an emotional low is strongly correlated with the impatient realization that the journey isn’t over yet or fear that we are “going back there (i.e., intense depression-anxiety) again.” One of the best indicators of progress is that ability to be sad or concerned and not be alarmed about these emotions. “Success” is not the absence of depression-anxiety, but the ability to experience depression-anxiety at situationally appropriate levels without getting stuck. Your ability not to feel threatened by these emotions is an important part of that.

**Read Philippians 4:12.** Notice that Paul says he knows how to be “brought low.” It almost sounds as if he is bragging about this ability because it was part of the “secret of contentment” (v. 11) and relying on God’s strength in all things (v. 13). Paul’s experiences of being brought low were intense (II Cor. 11:23-12:10). Doubtless hardships triggered the intensity of these past experiences for Paul. But he seems to be saying “having seen God’s faithfulness in the past experience of being ‘brought low’ gives me confidence in God’s future faithfulness when I am brought low. I will use what Satan meant for evil to remind myself of God’s unfailing presence.”

**12. Appreciate Your Growth Because of Grief:** You did not just learn (point one) and become better equipped to serve others (point seven). You’ve grown. You’re not just an emotionally smarter person with more helping strategies in your toolbox. You’re a more mature person. Having a skill is different from having maturity. Maturity transcends skills. Maturity allows the development of new, situationally-effective skills for yet-to-be-experienced circumstances. This is what God has done in your life. God’s work of maturity is one of the things that should give you comfort about the future.

**Read Job 42:1-6.** At the end of the book, Job does not know “why.” Yet he can see that God is good and has been good to him in spite of Job’s great losses. Verse 5 summarizes Job’s journey well. Job wanted answers he could hear with his ear and make sense of his suffering. Job got to see the character and redemption of God and received a peace that passes understanding (Phil. 4:7). At this stage in our battle with depression-anxiety we may not have answers to all the questions we wanted. Job didn’t either. But we will have come to the place where the answers we do have – an awareness of who God is and his faithfulness to us – are sufficient to allow us to live with hope. Adults are not more mature than children because they have all the answers, but because they have the ability to assess those things that are most important-reliable and live accordingly.

### Writing Your New Narrative

At this point in your journey, with the new normal settling in, you are at a place to see your story come together to a single, meaningful narrative again. This does not mean deciphering the “reason” for your depression-anxiety, but to understand the pieces of your life – including your emotional struggle – as parts of one larger, redemptive story.

Return to the six questions you examined in chapter 6. Use the chart below to reflect on how the larger narrative in which you experience depression-anxiety has changed.

In the left column summarize how you would have answered each question before this study. You will likely complete the entirety of the left column before reflecting on how you are approaching each question now; which is what you put in the right column. This should provide you with a better sense for how your larger life-narrative has changed.

If there are particular truths, experiences, or practices that have been most helpful to reinforce the kind of narrative change represented in each question also record those. This will allow this journaling exercise to remind you not only of “what” God has taught you but “how” he has made these lessons come to life and remain sticky in your life.

Before This Study	Now
<b>1. Who Am I Now?</b>	
<b>2. Who and Where Is God?</b>	
<b>3. What Should I Expect from My Friends?</b>	
<b>4. What Is Sin If This Is Suffering?</b>	
<b>5. Is Hope Worth Disappointment?</b>	
<b>6. What Am I Living For?</b>	

**Preparing for Transition**

This third section of chapter eight may feel like a change of pace. That is because it no longer has depression-anxiety as its focal point. This section asks the question, “What should my life begin to look like now that it’s not focused on overcoming depression-anxiety?”

**Make sure you are in a small group.** Trust takes time. If you have been going through this material with a counselor or mentor, the baton of trust will soon be passed from those more formal-private relationships to more natural-authentic relationships. One-way helping relationships are not long-term healthy as your primary source of support and encouragement. This needs to be experienced in two-way friendships.

The primary location in which this occurs is small groups. The lessons (cognitive and emotional) that God has taught you in the course of this study have been enhanced, protected, and applied largely because of the relationships in which you learned them. This is why it is wise for you to begin getting plugged into a general small group if you are not already. If you need help identifying which small group would be a good fit for you, talk with your counselor, mentor, or a church pastor.

Many of our small group leaders at The Summit Church have attended this training on “Overcoming Depression-Anxiety.” They care about the subject and are familiar with the content. It would be completely at your discretion whether to share with the leader why you chose their group.

**Learn accountability and encouragement on a broader scale.** Walking through this material with someone else may be the first time you have experienced ongoing, Christian accountability and encouragement. Accountability is not just for life-dominating struggles. It is part of God’s definition of “healthy.” People who do not have relationships in which they are honest about their struggles, seeking accountability and encouragement are people who are becoming “unhealthy.”

As you move from a counseling or mentoring relationship focused primarily upon depression-anxiety to a general small group, you may wonder what accountability and encouragement will look like now. The seven points below are meant to guide you in the kind of relationships you are looking to form with your small group.

1. Voluntary – Accountability is not something you have; it is something you do. You must disclose in order to benefit from the relationship. Hopefully, the positive experience you have had going through this material will encourage you to remain transparent and vulnerable.
2. Trusted – The other person(s) is someone you trust, admire their character, and believe has good judgment. You are encouraged to join a small group now so that you can build this trust before graduating from your formal counseling or mentoring relationship.
3. Mutual – Relationships that are one-sided tend to be short-lived. In the small group you will hear the weaknesses and struggles of others as you share your own. You will help carry their burdens as they help carry your burdens (Gal. 6:1-2).
4. Scheduled – Accountability that is not scheduled tends to fade. This is why small groups that meet on a weekly basis are an ideal place for accountability to occur. Everyone knows when to meet and has a shared expectation for how the accountability conversations will begin.
5. Relational – We want spiritual growth to become a lifestyle not an event. This means that we invite accountability to be a part of our regular conversations not just something that we do at a weekly meeting. It should mean that there are times when we are doing accountability and don’t realize it.
6. Comprehensive – Accountability that exclusively fixates on one subject tends to become repetitive and fade. It also tends to reduce “success” to trusting God in a single area of life.
7. Encouraging – Too often the word “accountability” carries the connotation of “sin hunt.” When that is the case accountability is only perceived to be “working” when it is negative. However, accountability that lasts should celebrate growth in character as fervently as it works on slips in character. This means asking each other questions about discouragement in addition to questions about temptations.

**Have a plan for future study.** We walk forward. We drift backwards. For some time now you have been a part of an intentional, structured process. If you leave that structure without a continued plan for deepening your understanding and application of Scripture to the struggles of life, you will regress. Ephesians 5:15-16 calls us to intentionality out of a recognition that time minus direction equals decay not healing.

Step seven of this study referenced many resources that would be beneficial for you. Doubtless several of them sounded interesting to you. Go back and identify the one you believe you would most benefit from reading. If you cannot identify one that stands out, then it is recommended you study “Finding Your Identity, Security, and Confidence in Christ” ([www.bradhambrick.com/identity](http://www.bradhambrick.com/identity)) as a resource to help you solidify your progress.

This entire study has been filled with devotional Bible studies. If you have not been taking the time to read the passages and reflect on the devotional thoughts / questions that accompany them, consider using those as a guide for daily Bible reading. This will be a way to reinforce what you’ve learned in this study and further solidify the biblical basis for what you’ve learned.

**Make a formal transition plan.** Write out your transition plan.

- List the things that need to be in place before you “graduate” from your formal counseling or mentoring relationship.
- List the important practices you have begun in this study that you will need to maintain. Write out what the “yellow flags” (don’t wait for the red ones) would be that you should address seriously if they appear.

Review your plan with your counselor or mentor. Get their input on what needs to be added to the plan. In consultation with them, decide what aspects from that list need to be brought into the accountability conversation with your new small group before you graduate.

### **Encouragement Focus (PERSEVERE):**

With each step, we will provide questions you should invite another person to ask you openly so they can know and encourage you in the process of grieving your loss or pain.

- Which of the “new normal” characteristics have you already begun to see in your life?
- What are the biggest differences in how you are understanding your life story now?
- What elements of a wise transition plan are not currently in place? What steps do you need to take?
- How well are you caring for yourself in the ways advised in chapter one?

With each step, we advise you to confide at least one new element of your suffering to your encouragement partner.

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

## Chapter 9

### “After Depression-Anxiety, Now What?”

STEWARD all of my life for God’s glory.

**“God has shown me great grace; grace greater than my depression-anxiety.  
I am learning what it means to live out of my new identity in Christ.  
That has pushed me to ask the question,  
‘How can I be a conduit of God’s grace to others?’  
As I have sought God, examined my life, and consulted with fellow believers,  
I believe this [describe] is what it looks like for me to steward God’s grace now.”**

**Memorize:** I Peter 4:19 (ESV), “Therefore let those who suffer according to God’s will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.” As you memorize this passage reflect upon these key points:

- “Those who suffer” – This passage will apply to every person many times in the course of their life.
- “God’s will” – Hopefully, at this stage in your journey you can read this without hearing it as God’s punishment.
- “Entrust their souls” – Life is a choice between entrusting our souls to God or seeking to protect ourselves.
- “To a faithful Creator” – If you made it to this point in the study, you have many evidences of God’s faithfulness.
- “While doing good” – Without a returning sense of mission, suffering would drain our vitality for engaging life.

#### Teaching Notes

To “steward” something means to use it for God’s intended purpose. It is important to remember that what is being stewarded is the life of the group member in general, not the sin specifically.

“The odd thing is that fear and anxiety are running away from something, but they don’t know what to run to. They know danger, but they don’t know where to find peace and rest (p. 63)... It’s as if fear needs to be replaced in our lives, and it is replaced with a simple question, ‘What does my Father, the King, want me to do now?’ (p. 241)... The goal is not the alleviation of anxiety so much as it is the pursuit of God’s purposes. If God’s ways meant an increase in fear and anxiety, so be it, but, of course, the opposite is true. As we apply the gospel of peace, we will know peace (p. 295-296).” Ed Welch in *Running Scared*

“We will never be transformed into a different person, but we can, with God’s help, become the best version of ourselves, which is the person he created us to be (p. 222).” Leslie Vernick in *Lord, I Just Want to Be Happy*

“If you are willing to be trained by it, expect depression to be a good teacher. That doesn’t mean you should seek it out, and it certainly doesn’t mean that you shouldn’t try to alleviate it. But most people who were willing to be taught by suffering look back and are grateful (p. 238).” Ed Welch in *Depression, A Stubborn Darkness*

## Embedded Study

It would be easy to want this study, like this season of your life, to just be over. But this study, like your life, has at least one more chapter (and several appendices) left. When you put a great deal of effort, as you undoubtedly have, into getting past something, it can be easy to forget that there is something next. The fact that God has brought you to this point should be evidence enough that He has more in store for you and more to do through you.

In this chapter you will be doing most of the writing, because it is your life that is being stewarded for the glory of God. No one else could write this chapter but you. What you will be given is nine questions that walk you through a life assessment to determine where God wants you to serve now and where He may want to prepare you to serve in the future.

**Read Luke 11:24-26.** This is a terrifying warning about comforting suffering when that comfort does not result in serving God’s purposes with your life. Comfort alone does not satisfy the human heart. In the absence of mission, life becomes purposeless. This lack of purpose is often experienced as a form of depression. When depression sets in after we have done all we know to do in processing a particular life challenge, then we truly begin to believe that there is no hope. If we lose hope, then the last state truly is worse than the first.

**Read Ephesians 2:8-10.** In this study we have traveled through the Gospel (v. 8-9) to good works (v. 10). The nine steps are merely the Gospel in slow motion. These nine steps show us God’s general pattern for redeeming and restoring our suffering. We are not exiting the Gospel in order to do good works, but cultivating the fruit of the Gospel. Paul says that there are “good works” that “God prepared” for every believer and that these should define our daily lives (“that we should walk in them”) (v. 10). There are answers to the questions you will be asked next. You have the confidence that comes from the promises of Scripture that God has a design for your life and wants you to know what it is.

As you read through and answer the next nine questions, remember God’s patience and timing. There will be some aspects of God’s design that you can engage in immediately. But there may also be ways you want to serve God that will require you to be more mature or be equipped before you are prepared to fulfill them. The main thing is to begin to have a vision for life that involves being God’s servant and actively engaging that vision where you are currently equipped.

**I. Am I willing to commit my life to whatever God asks of me?** This is a “do not pass go” question. If your answer is “no,” it will bias the answers you give to each subsequent question. Do not get lost in guilt or pretend that it is “yes.” Rather, identify the obstacle. What aspect of your suffering story (chapter 4) makes this sacrifice seem too risky?

Are there specific things you believe God is asking of you? Be sure to record your thoughts on this question before reflecting on the subsequent questions.

**2. What roles has God placed me in?** The first part of being a good steward of one’s life is to fulfill one’s primary roles with excellence. When Paul says in Ephesians 5:17 that we are to “understand what the will of the Lord is,” he goes on to describe God’s design for each of our major life roles (spouse, parent, child, and worker in 5:22-6:9).

**3. What are my spiritual gifts?** Stewarding your life for the glory of God involves utilizing the spiritual gifts God has given you. God gives spiritual gifts that coincide with the calling He places on each individual’s life. Read Romans 12:1-8 and I Corinthians 12:1-30. If you need further assistance discerning this, talk to a pastor about taking a spiritual gifts inventory.

**4. For what group of people (age, struggle, career, ethnic, etc...) am I burdened?** From God’s earliest covenant with people His intention was to bless us that we might be a blessing to others (Gen 12:2). By investing your life in those you have a burden for, it allows you to be other-minded and find joy in it.

**5. What am I passionate about?** At this point in the stewardship evaluation, you can begin to see Psalm 37:4 fulfilled in your life. There is a level of vulnerability involved in being passionate again, but allow yourself to express faith in God through this vulnerability and pursue the life He has for you.

**6. With what talents or abilities has God blessed me?** These need not be spiritual gifts. Read the amazing description of abilities God gave Bezalel and how he used those abilities to serve God (Exodus 31:1-11). Think through the skills and expertise you have accumulated in your life.

**7. What are my unique life experiences?** Both pleasant and unpleasant experiences should be listed. We are sometimes tempted to think that God can only use the good or spiritual experiences of our lives. God is glad to use our successes (Matt. 5:16), but God also delights in displaying His grace by transforming our suffering from flaming darts of Satan meant for our destruction to bridges of ministry carrying many people to life in Christ (2 Cor. 1:3-5).

**8. Where do my talents and passions match up with the needs in my church and community?** We should seek to steward our lives in cooperation with our local church. God’s way of blessing and maturing those we serve is through the Body of Christ, the church. By identifying where your gifts, burdens, passions, and abilities fit within or expanding your church’s ministries, you are maximizing the impact your service can have on those you are seeking to bless and protecting yourself from discouragement through isolation.

**9. How would God have me bring these things together to glorify Him?** This is not a new question, but a summary question. Look back over what you have written. Talk about it with your Christian friends, family, mentor, or pastors. Dedicate a time to prayerfully ask God to give you a sense of direction. Then begin serving as a way to steward your life for God’s glory.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Matthew 5:3

**Encouragement Focus (STEWARDSHIP):**

With each step, we will provide questions you should invite another person to ask you openly so they can know and encourage you in the process of grieving your loss or pain.

- Are there necessary changes you have omitted that would make it unwise for you to finish this study?
- Have you demonstrated a significant number of the “new normal” characteristics evidencing readiness to finish?
- How well are you caring for yourself in the ways advised in chapter one?

## Appendix A

### 6 Steps to Wise Decision Making About Psychotropic Medications

Note: This post is an excerpt from a larger article entitled “Towards a Christian Perspective on Mental Illness” ([www.bradhambrick.com/mentalillness](http://www.bradhambrick.com/mentalillness)). In that article, before addressing the subject of psychotropic medications, four prior questions were addressed:

1. How do we learn to frame the discussion about mental illness in a way that helps us remove our personal biases; which we all have and need to be aware of as we enter this conversation?
2. What is mental illness; both how is the term actually used and how ought the term to be defined?
3. How do we determine if a given struggle is primarily rooted in biological, environmental, or volitional causes; or some combination of these influences?
4. How would Scripture speak uniquely to a given struggle based upon these various possible causes or combination of influences?

It is after laying the foundation of attempting to answer these questions that the subject of how to make a wise decision about psychotropic medications is addressed. I hope you enjoy and benefit from this excerpt.

--

Let’s begin this discussion by placing the question in the correct category – whether an individual chooses to use psychotropic medication in their struggle with mental illness is a wisdom decision, not a moral decision. If someone is thinking, “Would it be bad for me to consider medication? Is it a sign of weak faith? Am I taking a short-cut in my walk with God?” then they are asking important questions (the potential use of medication) but they are placing them in the wrong category (morality instead of wisdom).<sup>1</sup>

Better questions would be:

- How do I determine if medication would be a good fit for me and my struggle?
- What types of relief should I expect medication to provide and what responsibilities would I still bear?
- How would I determine if the relief I’m receiving warrants the side effects I may experience?
- How do I determine the initial duration of time I should be on medication?

In order to answer these kinds of questions, I would recommend a six step process. This process will, in most cases, take six months or more to complete. But it often takes many months for doctors and patients to arrive at the most effective medication option, so this process does not elongate the normal duration of finding satisfactory medical treatment.

Having an intentional process is much more effective than making reactionary choices when the emotional pain (getting on medication) or unpleasant side effects (getting off medication) push you to “just want to do something different.” With a process in place, it is much more likely that what is done will provide the necessary information to make important decisions about the continuation or cessation of medication.

**Preface:** This six step process assumes that the individual considering medication is not a threat to themselves, a threat to others, and is capable of fulfilling basic life responsibilities related to their personal care, family, school, and work. If this is not the case, then a more prompt medical intervention or residential care would be warranted.

If you are unsure how well you or a friend is functioning, then begin with a medical consultation or counseling relationship. If you would like more time with your doctor than a diagnostic and prescription visit, then ask the receptionist if you can schedule an extended time with your physician for consultation on your symptoms and options.

---

<sup>1</sup> For more on understanding the choice about psychotropic medications as a wisdom issue, I would recommend the lecture “Understanding Psychiatric Treatments” by Michael Emlet, MD at the 2011 CCEF conference on “Psychiatric Disorders” which can be found at <http://www.ccef.org/understanding-psychiatric-treatments>.

### Step One – Assess Life and Struggle

Most struggles known as mental illness do not have a body-fluid test (i.e., blood, saliva, or urine) to verify their presence. We do not know a “normal range” for neurotransmitters like we do for cholesterol. The activity of the brain is too dynamic to make this kind of simple number test easy to obtain. Gaining neurological fluid samples would be highly intrusive and more traumatic than the information would be beneficial. Brain scans are not currently cost effective for this kind of medical screening and cannot yet give us the neurotransmitter differentiation we would need.

For these reasons, the diagnosis for whether a mental illness has a biological cause is currently a diagnosis-by-elimination in most cases. However, an important part of this initial assessment should be a visit to your primary care physician. In this visit you should:

- Clearly describe the struggles / symptoms that you are experiencing.
- Describe when each struggle / symptom began.
- Describe the current severity of each struggle / symptom and how it developed.

As you prepare for this medical visit, it would be important to also consider:

- What important life events, transitions, or stressors occurred around the time your struggle began?
- What is the level of life-interference you are experiencing as a result of your struggle?
- What lifestyle or relational changes would significantly impact the struggle that you’re facing?

### Step Two – Make Needed Non-Medical Changes

Medication will never make us healthier than our current choices allow. Our lifestyle is the “ceiling” for our mental health; we will never be sustainably happier than our beliefs and choices allow. Medication can correct some biological causes and diminish the impact of environmental causes to our struggles. But medication cannot raise our “mental health potential” above what our lifestyle allows.

Too often we want medication to make-over our unhealthy life choices in the same way we expect a multi-vitamin to transform our unhealthy diet. We assume that the first step towards feeling better is receiving a diagnosis and prescription. This may be the case, and there is no shame if it is, but it need not be our guiding assumption.

Look at the lifestyle, beliefs, and relational changes that your assessment in step one would require. If there are choices that you could make to reduce the intensity of your struggle, are you willing to make them? Undoubtedly these changes will be hard, or you would have already done so. But they are essential if you want to use medication wisely.

As you identify these changes, assess the areas of sleep, diet, and exercise. Sleep is vital to the replenishing of the brain. Diet is the beginning of brain chemistry – our body can only create neurotransmitters from the nutrition we provide it. Exercise, particularly cardiovascular, has many benefits for countering the biological stress response (a primary contributor to poor mental health). Your first “prescription” should be eight hours of sleep, a balanced diet high in antioxidants, and cardiovascular exercise for at least thirty minutes three days a week.<sup>2</sup>

A key indicator of whether we are using psychotropic medication wisely is whether we are (a) using medication as a tool to assist us in making needed lifestyle and relational changes, or (b) using medication as an alternative to having to make these changes. “Option A” is wise. “Option B” results in over-medication or feeling like “medication didn’t work either” as we continually try to compensate medically for our volitional neglect of our mental health.

### Step Three – Determine the Non-Medicated Base-Line for Your Mood and Life Functioning

This is an important, and often neglected, step. Any medication is going to have side effects. The most frequent reason people stop taking psychotropic medications, other than cost, is because of their side effects.

---

<sup>2</sup> Additional guidance on this kind of “life hygiene” can be found at [www.bradhambrick.com/burnout](http://www.bradhambrick.com/burnout).

If we are not careful, we will merely want to feel better than we do “now.” Initially “now” will be how we feel without medication. Later “now” will be how we feel with medication’s side effects. In order to avoid this unending cycle, we need to have a baseline of how we feel when we live optimally off of medication.

One of the reasons postulated for why placebos often have as beneficial an effect as psychotropic medication is the absence of side effects. Those who take a placebo get all the benefits of hope (doing something they expect to improve their life) without any unpleasant side effects. Getting the baseline measurement of how life goes when you simply practice “good mental hygiene” is an important way to account for this effect.

“As I practice medicine these days, my first question when a patient comes with a new problem is not what new disease he has. Now I wonder what side effects he is having and which drug is causing it (p. 191).” Charles Hodges, M.D. in *Good Mood Bad Mood*

There is another often over-looked benefit of step three. Frequently people get serious about living more healthily at the same time life has gotten hard enough to begin taking medication. This introduces two interventions (medication and new life practices), maybe three or four (often people also begin counseling or being more open with friends who offer care and support), at the same time. It becomes very difficult to discern which intervention accounts for their improvements.

Writing out your answers to these questions will help you discern if you need to move on to step four and make the needed assessment in step five.

- What were the struggles that initially made me think I might benefit from medication?
- How intense were these struggles and how did they manifest themselves?
- What changes did I make in my lifestyle and relationships to alleviate these struggles?
- How effective was I at being able to make the needed changes?
- How much relief did the lifestyle and relational changes provide for my struggles?
- How do I anticipate medication would assist me in being more effective at these changes?

#### **Step Four – Begin a Medication Trial**

If your struggles persist to a degree that is impairing your day-to-day functioning, then you should seek out a physician or psychiatrist for advisement about medical options. As you have this conversation, consider asking your physician the following questions:

- What are the different medication options available for the struggle I’m facing?
- What does each medication do that impacts this struggle?
- What are the most common side effects for each medication?
- How long does it take this medication before it is in full effect?
- If I chose to come off this medication, what is the process for doing so?
- What have been the most common affirmations and complaints of other patients on this medication?

These questions should help you work with your doctor to determine which medication would be best for you. Remember, you have a voice in this process and should seek to be an informed consumer with your medical treatment; in the same way you would for any other product or service you purchase.

In this consultation you also want to decide upon the initial period of time for which you will remain on the medication (unless you experience a significant side effect from the medication). In determining this length of time, you would want to consider:

- Your physician or psychiatrist will make recommendations based upon additional factors not considered in this article
- A minimum of at least twice the length of time it takes the medication to reach its full effect
- Significant life stressors that would predictably arise during this trial period (e.g., planning a wedding)
- How long it would take to make and solidify changes that were difficult to make without medication (see step three)

Once you determine this set period of time, your goal is to continue implementing the changes you began in step three while monitoring (a) the level of progress in your area of struggle and (b) any side effects from the medication.

### **Step Five – Assess Level of Progress Against the Medication Side Effects**

Near the end of the trial period, you want to return to the life assessment questions you answered at the end of step three. Compare how you are able to enjoy and engage life at this point with your answers then. The questions you want to ask are:

- What benefits have you seen while you were on medication?
- What side effects have you experienced?
- Is there reason to believe your continued improvement is contingent upon your continued use of medication?
- Are the side effects of medication worth the benefit it provides?

The more specific you were in your answers at the end of step three, the easier it will be to evaluate your experience at the end of step five. At this point, try to be neither pro-medication nor anti-medication. Your goal is to live as full and enjoyable a life as possible. It is neither better nor worse if medication is or is not part of that optimal life.

### **Step Six – Determine Whether to Remain on Medication**

At this point in the process there are several options available to you; this is more than a yes-no decision. But any option should be decided in consultation with your prescribing physician or psychiatrist. You can decide to:

- Remain on medication because the effects are beneficial and the side effects are minimal or worth it.
- Opt to stage off of your medication because the benefits were minimal or the side effects worse than the benefits.
- Stage off medication to see if the progress you made can be maintained without medication; knowing you are free to resume the medication if not without any sense of failure.
- Opt to try a different medication for another set period of time based on what you learned from the initial experience.

Regardless of what you choose, by following this process you can have the assurance that you are making an informed decision about what is the best choice for you.

# Appendix B COMMITMENT TO LIFE

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (print name) agree to the following:

1. One of my major goals is to live a long life with more fulfillment and meaning than I have now.
2. I understand that becoming suicidal when depressed or upset keeps me from attaining this goal, and I want to overcome this tendency.
3. As a part of my commitment to live, I am agreeing to (initial in all blanks that apply):

\_\_\_\_\_ Schedule and attend an appointment with the church counseling ministry: 919.383.7100.

\_\_\_\_\_ Not place myself in situations where I will be alone.

\_\_\_\_\_ Remove objects with which I could harm myself from my direct access.

\_\_\_\_\_ Refrain from alcohol, drugs, or other mood altering substances.

\_\_\_\_\_ Distance myself from situations / people that tend to trigger my despair (list below).

- 
- 
- 

\_\_\_\_\_ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

4. If at any time I should feel unable to resist suicidal thoughts or impulses, I agree to call \_\_\_\_\_ (print name) at (\_\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ or (\_\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ or go directly to \_\_\_\_\_ (hospital or emergency room) at \_\_\_\_\_ (address).

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Print Name*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Signature*

\_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_  
*Date*

## FIRST AID COUNSEL FOR A SUICIDAL FRIEND

Some people are concerned to bring up suicide because they do not want to plant self-destructive ideas in the mind of a despondent person. The risk of silence, however, far outweighs the risk of asking. Whenever you are speaking to an individual who sounds hopeless—one of the key predictors of suicide—always ask them directly, “Have you thought about suicide?” If the answer is *yes* or *maybe* – take it seriously. There is no need to panic, the person is speaking with you, so they want help and are presently safe. Your primary objectives in this conversation are to gain a commitment from the person not to kill him/herself, ensure that he/she has responsible accountability, and to provide hope.

### Key Questions:

1. Have you considered committing suicide?
2. Do you have a plan for how you would take your life? (*Bullet A*)
3. Do you have access to the things necessary to accomplish your plan? (*Bullet B*)
4. Have you begun saying good-byes, written a fair-well letter, or give things away? (*Bullet C*)
5. What purpose would your death serve (to punish someone, relief from pain, get attention)?
6. Has a close family member or friend committed suicide? (*Bullet D*)
7. When are you going to be alone in the coming days/weeks?
8. Do you plan to use drugs/alcohol any time soon? (This heightens emotions and impairs judgment.)
9. Who in your life can serve as caring support, accountability and encouragement?
10. What obstacle would you need to overcome in order for life to be worth living?

### Warning Signs/Special Considerations:

- A. A person who has a plan is much more likely to actually commit suicide than someone who is merely thinking about it, though both should be taken seriously. The lethality of their method of choice also raises the degree of action to be taken.
- B. When the person speaks of a specific means (“with the gun in my dresser drawer” or “off of the 5th Street Bridge”) their threat should be treated as an absolute fact. This means calling law enforcement and ensuring 24 hour a day supervision.
- C. A more cheerful attitude is not necessarily a sign of improvement. Often after the person has finalized their plan to kill him/herself they are relieved that a decision has been made. Again the best procedure is to ask direct questions and maintain supervision.
- D. Having a close family member or friend who has committed suicide removes much of the taboo from the act. A person who has been through the process before may not be as frightened by the idea of suicide.
- E. If you have any doubt whatsoever, be sure to have the person to sign the life contract (see attached). Allow the person to hold on to your hope in the interim until they can see that there is reason to live. Let them know you care too much to let them die.

### Biblical Hope/Action:

**Job 3** – The Bible speaks vividly of the emotions and thoughts you are experiencing. God is not ignorant of these matters. He cares enough to give you words for these dark times (see also Psalm 44:9-26 and 88).

**Psalm 23:4** – The believer can be certain of God’s presence in the darkest times.

**I Corinthians 10:13** – God promise give you a reason to HOPE! There is a way out of your circumstances besides suicide. God promises to give you the ability to endure this hardship.

### Taking the Next Step:

Having this in your hands means you are taking an important step. You are seeking help. In order to follow through with that help you will need to call The Summit Church office at (919) 383-7100 to set up an appointment with one of our counselors. Please visit our website at [www.summitredu.com/counseling](http://www.summitredu.com/counseling) and complete a copy of the “Standard Intake Forms.” We look forward to partnering with you and walking alongside of you on this path of hope and healing.

## Appendix C

### What Do I Do Now?

A plumb line of the Summit counseling ministry is, “We don’t do events; we create resources.” That means you should be asking yourself, “What can or should I do with this information now?”

We have created a series of brief videos that answer that what-now question from several different perspectives. Each of these can be found at:

[www.bradhambrick.com/whatnow](http://www.bradhambrick.com/whatnow)

#### Personal Study or Small Group

Question: I’ve been to several of the Summit counseling seminars and notice there appears to be a couple of different kinds. You frequently recommend studying them as a small group or with a friend. That seems like a great idea, but since I haven’t done that before I’m not quite sure how to start something like that. Do you mind giving me guidance?

#### Pursue Personal Counseling

Question: After attending this seminar I realized I would like to pursue counseling to help me grow in this area. It sounded like there are several different options available. Would you mind explaining to me what those are and how I could connect with the one that best serves me need?

#### Leveraging My Workplace

Question: I’ve heard rumors that I’m supposed to be able to use the Summit counseling seminars to leverage my workplace for gospel influence. My first impression is that it sounds awkward and intrusive; like I’m telling people they’ve “got issues” or “need help.” But I’m also worried about putting up Christian material that might be offensive to some people who visit my workplace. But I would at least like to hear what you’ve got to say. How would this work?

#### As a Professional Counselor

Question: I’m a licensed counselor (LPC) and came across the Summit counseling seminars. I’m excited to see the church addressing these kinds of subjects, and I’m curious how you might see someone in my position (or a LCSW or LMFT) using the materials. I can see recommending them to my clients who are open to an overtly Christian aspect to their counseling, but it seems like there could be more uses than just counseling homework. Could you share your thoughts on how those in private practice might use these resources?

Our goal in Summit counseling is to (1) equip the church to care for one another and our community with excellence; (2) provide quality counseling services that allow our people to get involved in the lives of others with confidence – knowing additional, experienced care is available to come alongside them if needed; and (3) create ways for our members and other Christians in our community to leverage their workplace and careers for greater gospel impact in their spheres of influence.

We hope this seminar and these videos give you a vision for how this can happen and stirs a passion in you to be a part of God’s work of redeeming and restoring hurting individuals and families.