



Depression & Anxiety

Allowing the Gospel to Speak to Our Emotional Responsibilities

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Overcoming Anxiety-Depression: A Personal Responsibility Paradigm

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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.

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

**To learn more about Summit’s counseling ministry visit
www.summitrdu.com/counseling**

Chapter I

“The Battle Against *What Might Happen*” ADMIT I have a struggle I cannot overcome without God.

“Not overcoming my anxiety-depression would be more costly than anything God would take me through in the pursuit of His freedom. God is good for having brought me to this point of admitting my need of Him.”

Memorize: Psalm 56:3-4 (ESV), “When I am afraid, I put my trust in you. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I shall not be afraid. What can flesh do to me?” As you memorize this passage reflect upon these key points:

- “When I am afraid” – The authors of Scripture were never slow to acknowledge their anxiety or despair.
- “Trust in you” – In moments of anxiety-depression we will trust something (our fear or God) and doubt the other.
- “Whose word I praise” – The experience of anxiety-depression calls for more truth and right-thinking than peace.
- “I shall not be afraid” – During times of anxiety-depression we must be direct with our own thoughts.
- “What can” – Consider the influence of “what can” thinking versus “what if” thinking on depression-anxiety.

Teaching Notes

“Fear and anxiety are more confident than they should be (p. 63)... You will trust in something or someone; that's part of being human (p. 16).” Ed Welch in *When I Am Afraid*

“It is a sin to complain against God, and we must see our complaints as such (p. 99)... The Bible speaks of contentment not only as a virtue, but also as a command (p. 107).” John MacArthur, Jr. in *Anxiety Attacked*

“The problem is compounded with men because men aren't supposed to be afraid. With no permission to discuss fears, men opt for anger (p. 34).” Ed Welch in *Running Scared*

“At some point Eve went from suffering to using that suffering to justify living in a way that disobeyed, even rebelled, against God (p. 129).” Charles Hodges, M.D. in *Good Mood Bad Mood*

“Such strange creatures are we that we probably smart more under blows which never fall upon us than we do under those which do actually come. The rod of God does not smite us as sharply as the rod of our own imagination does; our groundless fears are our chief tormentors.” Charles Spurgeon in his sermon “Our Needless Fears” delivered June 11, 1874.

“The fact that human beings are self-transcendent and thus can contemplate their own nonbeing/death, creates an anxiety that is central to our lives... Human beings live in the dilemma of both creatureliness and self-transcendence, which generates immense anxiety—the simultaneous anxiety of living and of dying (p. 47).” Robert Albers, William Meller, and Steven Thurber in *Ministry with Persons with Mental Illness and Their Families*

“Anxiety exists on a spectrum from normal to pathological and one of our tasks is to distinguish between the two (p. 34).” Robert Albers, William Meller, and Steven Thurber in *Ministry with Persons with Mental Illness and Their Families*

“Worriers are visionaries minus the optimism (p. 50)... No one can prove worriers wrong, so there is a veneer of reasonableness to every worry... Worry has become your talisman to ward off future catastrophe (p. 51).” Ed Welch in *Running Scared*

Embedded Study

Human beings are unique from all other creatures in our ability to experience anxiety-depression at times that do not immediately demand the response of fear or despair. Our twin abilities to anticipate and reflect, which account for the major advancements of civilization, also give these unpleasant emotions a chronic place in our lives.

Human beings can not only learn from the past, we can be shamed or traumatized by our past. We can not only plan for the future, we can project many different worst-case scenarios or unrealistic expectations for our future. The same abilities that allow for the greatest human achievements also generate some of our most intense internal tortures.

When Satan tempted Eve, he said eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil would make them “like God” (Genesis 3:4). He was right, not because Adam and Eve become small deities, but because we gained the partial ability – at least cognitively – to simultaneously live in the past, present, and future. We began to bear the weight of what was, is, and might be with only the ability to influence the present.

One result of this is that depression-anxiety became a very normal part of the fallen human experience. No longer were we willing to live each moment in contented, trusting reliance upon God. We began to want to know “what we would do if…” some bad thing happened (a non-issue before the Fall) and to be ruled by “what we should have done instead of…” some bad or untimely thing we did (another non-issue before the Fall).

In this we see that all depression-anxiety has its roots in sin. That is not to say that all depression-anxiety is the direct consequence of personal sin. Biology, environment, and choice all play a role in our emotions. A big part of this seminar will be learning to identify the role and implications of each.

But the human capacity for unhealthy, untimely depression-anxiety (emotions that are not a proportional response to some immediate dangerous stimulus) became possible at the Fall and are exacerbated as we seek to live lives that are increasingly independent from God. That is why, in this seminar, we will look at those aspects of depression-anxiety over which our choices and beliefs have influence and learn how to find the freedom God provides for these aspects of those emotions in the gospel through repentance, trust of God’s character, and obedience to God’s Word.

Sin vs. Suffering

You may be wondering why we’re using the nine steps for sin in this material. Are we trying to say that depression-anxiety is a choice over which you should have total control? Are we implying that depression-anxiety reveals a character defect that always requires repentance?

No. 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. 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 sin because we want to examine the beliefs, values, and actions which contribute to your anxiety-depression struggle. We want you to do this so you can see how the gospel offers hope, in the form of forgiveness, purpose, and truth, for those aspects of your life that contribute to your depression-anxiety.

In a separate study we will look at the same depression-anxiety struggle using the nine steps for suffering in which we will explore how God would care for, guide, and see those whose emotions emerge from areas of life for which you do not bear moral responsibility.

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. They are both built around a journey to the same God through the same gospel for the same hope. One is designed to take you through terrain over which you have less direct control and responsibility than the other.

Depression-Anxiety Assessment

Instructions: Read the following descriptive statements. As you read them, think of times when you are facing agitation or disappointment; being calm when nothing is wrong is not a sign of overcoming anger or self-control. 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/anxietydepression.

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

Conclusion

At this point we hope two things are true: (1) you are able to put your struggle into words better than you could a few pages ago; and (2) you see your need for God to overcome the struggle you face. God is always available; the question is whether we see our need for him. Hope begins when we do.

We will look at many other important factors in the chapters to come, but for the present time, maintain your commitment to these two things.

1. Admitting your need to change in the areas you discovered in this chapter.
2. Embracing God’s commitment to be with and for you in that process of change.

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 you are enlisting be part of your community support network about what they can do to help.

Accountability Focus (ADMIT):

With each step, we will provide questions you should invite another person to encourage you and hold you accountable with to make important changes.

- What specific forms does your struggle with depression-anxiety take?
- Are you enlisting the right people – friends, pastor, counselor, physician, etc... – for your struggle?

With each step, we advise you to confide at least one new element you are learning about your depression-anxiety struggle to your accountability partner. These commitments are preliminary to chapter six “life restructuring” but serve to build progress while you get to that point.

- _____
- _____

Chapter 2

“It Gets Worse Before It Gets Better” ACKNOWLEDGE the breadth and impact of my sin.

“I am beginning to see the extent and impact of my lack of faith-trust in God. It is bigger than I wanted to admit [describe] and still may be bigger than I realize. Apart from God’s grace, I am a fearful-depressive person.

I acknowledge that there is no safety and no freedom in excusing my lack of faith-trust [describe]. Before I can truly rest in the greatness of Jesus I must acknowledge the magnitude of what His death and resurrection has conquered on my behalf and in my life.”

Memorize: II Corinthians 1:8-9 (ESV), “For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead.” As you memorize this passage reflect upon these key points:

- “To be unaware” – The Bible believes there is value in our awareness of how hard life can be even for believers.
- “Affliction” – While not described in detail, these experiences surely manifested depression-anxiety symptoms.
- “Beyond Our Strength” – Paul was not ashamed to admit, or to write, that these experiences were overwhelming.
- “Despaired of Life” – Paul was willing to acknowledge the full extent to which his despairing thoughts reached.
- “But... God” – We get to hear what God taught Paul through his depressive-anxious crisis. What God teaches or does in the midst of our depression-anxiety experience may be different, but God is no less faithful.

Teaching Notes

“Anxiety recruits additional anxiety. Persons with pathological anxiety (e.g., those with an anxiety disorder) typically scan the environment and are hyper vigilant for stimuli that might evoke anxiety and monitor themselves for symptoms of anxiety (such as rapid pulse or difficulty breathing). Such scanning and monitoring represents a state of anticipatory anxiety (p. 37).” Robert Albers, William Meller, and Steven Thurber in *Ministry with Persons with Mental Illness and Their Families*

“Strong emotions cause significant blind spots (p. 88)... We need to see chronic busyness as a warning bell that we’ve gotten out of tune with God and reduced ourselves into *human doings* instead of human beings (p. 180).” Leslie Vernick in *Lord, I Just Want to Be Happy*

“Mania can be fun at first, but if it goes too high or too fast, the fun ends and the nightmare begins (p. 51).” Kathryn Greene-McCreight in *Darkness Is My Only Companion*

“Anxiety about finances can give rise to coveting and greed and hoarding and stealing. Anxiety about succeeding at some task can make you irritable and abrupt and surly. Anxiety about relationships can make you withdrawn and indifferent and uncaring about other people. Anxiety about how someone will respond to you can make you cover the truth and lie about many things. So if anxiety could be conquered, a mortal blow would be struck to many other sins (p. 53).” John Piper in *Future Grace*

“When people struggle with a depressed mood, they do hurt emotionally, and the pain they feel spreads to every corner of their lives, touching all who know and love them (p. 22)... If you want to take the measure of someone’s character, the most direct route I can think of is to tell him no (p. 137).” Charles Hodges, M.D. in *Good Mood Bad Mood*

“Why does this happen? Because of the plasticity or mutability of the brain. Over time, new neural pathways can be created by habit of thought so that even the slightest suggestion of a frightening imagination can instantaneously produce a rapid heartbeat or upset stomach (p. 125).” Elyse Fitzpatrick and Laura Hendrickson in *Will Medicine Stop the Pain?*

Embedded Study

Let's be honest, acknowledging the breadth and impact of your depressive-anxious struggle is not going to make it better at first. If our only goal is relief, then this is a bad strategy. But if our goal is to overcome our depressive-anxious struggle, to whatever degree this is possible, then this type of assessment is the only strategy. Ignorance may allay our fear-despair in the moment, but compounds them in the long run.

Why bring this up? Because many who struggle with anxiety-depression get into the emotional habit of trading dimes for nickels because they are larger and perceived as having more value (a cruel joke big brothers have played on little brothers since the minting of coins began). The emotional equivalent is pursuing short-term relief in a way that increases long-term distress. Until we are willing to stop making this trade we will be emotionally bankrupt no matter how hard we work to earn more dimes to trade for nickels.

The hope this chapter provides is that it equips us to take every future step with greater effectiveness. The information gleaned in the midst of completing this step is what will allow cliché advice to become a well-tailored strategy. Knowing your struggle better will allow you to move from using God's Word as a source of broad-general principles to targeted truths combating core lies that undergird your depressive-anxious struggle.

“The first step toward overcoming your fears is to locate them... The attractiveness of God's words to you depends on it. If you can't see your fears and worries, then God's words of comfort won't go deep (p. 5).” Ed Welch in *When I Am Afraid*

Remind yourself of this when you are tempted to say this chapter is “too hard.” Christians have always had to discipline themselves to remember key truths in hard times (Lamentations 3:21ff). Do not try to accomplish this on your own. Enlist friends, small group members, a pastor, or a counselor to become a support network that prays for you in this process and with whom you can share when the process is hard. Don't forget to pray for God's strength. He does not hear your cries for help as whining. Throughout the Bible he invites you to call upon him.

In this chapter we will seek to answer three questions in our effort to “acknowledge the breadth and impact of our depressive-anxious struggle.”

- When is depression-anxiety sinful?
- What kinds of thinking undergird depression-anxiety?
- What areas of life are affected by depression-anxiety?

When is Anxiety-Depression Sinful?

How do we know if our depression-anxiety is wrong: an evidence of a lack of faith or the result of valuing-trusting something more than God? There are many experiences of a depressive-anxious mood which are clearly not sinful.

- *Suspense* over a good book, movie, or close ball game.
- *Crying* with a friend who is grieving the loss of a loved one.
- *Anticipating* a significant event (e.g., the birth of child).
- The *forethought of unpleasant circumstances* that allows for wise planning.
- The *drive* of an athlete who channels the possibility of failure into practice.

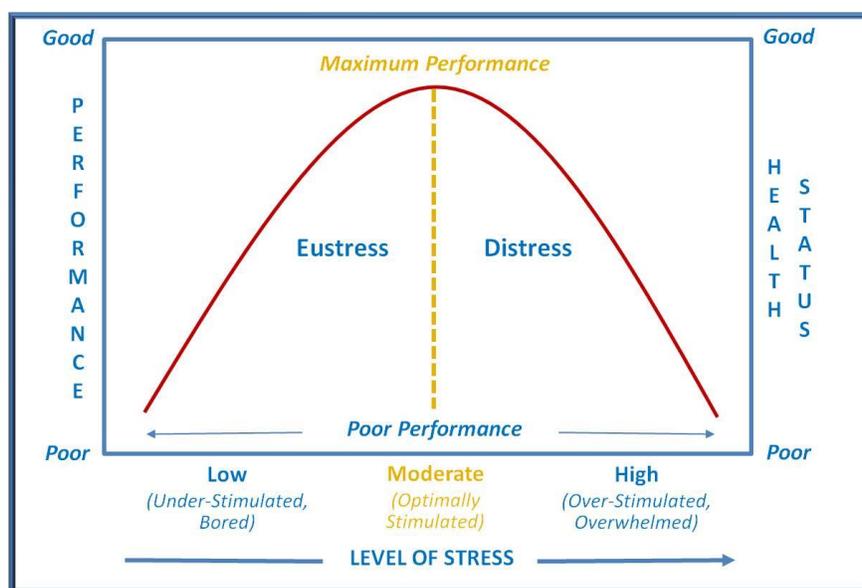
What would you add to the list of experiences that belong to the depressive-anxious family which are not immoral?

Read Philippians 4:4 and Matthew 5:4. Based upon the non-contradictory nature of Scripture, we must remind ourselves that the command of Philippians 4:4, “Rejoice in the Lord always,” does not negate the decree of Matthew 5:4, “Blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted.” God does not require that his children perpetually live at the positive end of the emotional spectrum. The command of Philippians 4:4 should be understood in two senses.

1. A *warning* against allowing unpleasant experiences to rob our capacity for joy. When fear, despair, bitterness, or other unpleasant emotion removes our capacity for joy, we are in spiritual danger. God's commands are an expression of his concern, not a theistic power trip. When we trust his purpose in giving a command, it gives us freedom from the fear of punishment and, thereby, allows us engage the process of change with an attitude of appreciation instead of compulsion.
2. An *expression of concern* like that of a parent who says to their children in the imperative verb tense, "Drive safe." This is technically a command, but primarily an expression of love. The parent is saying, "You are precious to me so please be safe." Similarly, God is saying, "If you have lost the capacity for joy, then something is wrong which concerns me and I do not want you to ignore it by simply thinking the problem will fix itself eventually."

Beyond saying not all anxiety-depression is sin, we can go so far as to say that some experiences of anxiety-depression are actually good. The capacity for a down mood and the ability to anticipate the future are not simply byproducts of the Fall. These emotions can warn of danger (good), motivate us to change (good), be used to consoled ourselves or others (good), or distract us from God (bad).

One way (but not the only way) to see where this line is crossed is to examine how anxiety affects our ability to be effective and productive. The correlation of our stress level and effectiveness follow a bell curve.



The prefix "eu" means "good or beneficial," so eustress is that level of concern or pressure which enhances our senses and raises our level of performance. We usually use positively connotated words to describe these experiences: anticipation, eagerness, hopefulness, or a phrase like "I can't wait." The neurochemicals of these experiences are nearly identical to that of unhealthy anxiety.

At some point, which varies from person to person and by subject to subject, this eustress begins to be counter-productive and we call it distress. We should not equate productivity with morality, but we can begin to see more clearly that the capacity for depression-anxiety has the potential to enhance or diminish our quality of life.

So now, let's engage the question directly, "When does anxiety-depression become sinful?" Something becomes sinful when it offends God or violates his design. Therefore, the stronger you answer "yes" to these kinds of questions, the more likely your anxious-depressive experience are revealing sin.

- Does your depression-anxiety come from or cause doubting of God's goodness?
- Does your depression-anxiety come from or cause trying to control things that are God's to determine?
- Is your depression-anxiety rooted in other sins such as bitterness, greed, jealousy, or discontentment?
- Is your depression-anxiety rooted in a sense of entitlement or comparing yourself to others?
- Is your depression-anxiety the result of shame about or a fear of being "found out" for another sin?

It is important to distinguish anxiety-depression that is caused by sin from anxiety-depression that results in sin. In the former (questions above), we repent of the emotions themselves, or least what they reveal about us. In the latter (questions below), we repent of how we’ve allowed these emotions to manifest themselves in our life.

- Does your depression-anxiety result in sins of omission?
- Does your depression-anxiety result in a sense of helplessness and passivity towards life?
- Does your depression-anxiety result in destructive habits as a form of escape or self-medication?
- Does your depression-anxiety result in self-centeredness where it is hard to consider others?
- Does your depression-anxiety result in pride (e.g., a sense that you’re the exception to what would be helpful)?

Use these questions to help you to “sort your emotional laundry”?

Anxiety-Depression Experiences that Reveal Sin	Anxiety-Depression Experiences that Result in Sin

Rewrite the quote about mania (part of the Bipolar experience) about your struggle with depression-anxiety. Sort through the things that your emotional experience can and cannot “make you do.” Begin to guard your thoughts from giving responsibility to your emotions for things for which you bear personal responsibility.

“With regards to mania, the Bible tells us that mania can’t make you sin. Mania can’t make you do things that Scripture prohibits (such as adultery), and it can’t keep you from things that Scripture prescribes (such as love). Mania can create a world of temptations. It can try to persuade you to trust your intuitive judgments rather than be suspicious of them. It can tempt you to believe that the best thing to do is empty all your accounts and play the lottery with numbers you are certain will win. It can make wise judgments less natural for you because certain decisions feel so right. But it can’t make you do anything that Scripture calls morally wrong (p. 9-10).” Ed Welch in *Bipolar Disorder*

What Kinds of Thinking Undergird Depression-Anxiety?

Just as we can have bad physical habits – biting our nails, picking our nose, or eating junk food late at night – we can also have bad mental habits. There are styles of thinking that are highly prone to cause and perpetuate depression-anxiety. Just as the first step for someone to stop biting their nails is to realize they are doing it, an important step in overcoming depression-anxiety is to recognize these patterns of thought as they are occurring.

Below are ten styles of thinking that fuel the depressive-anxious experience. The goal in studying this section is to realize when you’re “doing” depression-anxiety. In the moments below, depression-anxiety is not “happening to you” but “coming from you.” These are patterns that, by the freedom God gives in the gospel, you can overcome.

In this step, we will briefly examine the futility of each pattern of thought and the truths that debunk them. But it is important to remember that depression-anxiety cannot merely be reasoned away. Here you are arming yourself with awareness and truth which you will live out in relationship with God and others in the steps to come.

“[On the particular fear of flying] I've flown many times before and nothing has happened. It's the safest way to travel. This might help, but rests on the premise that fear submits to logic, which is a dubious assumption. In reality, fears are rarely logical (p. 23).” Ed Welch in *Running Scared*

1. **Idealistic:** Ideals are good goals without a sense of time. Most often, if we could stretch our ideals out over a few months or years, they would serve us well. But in their time-condensed form they crush our soul and emotions. Ideals towards others result in pride and anger. Ideals towards ourselves result in depression-anxiety.

Pay attention for times when words like “should” and “ought” dominate your thinking. Memorize Hebrews 10:14 and rest in the reality that what God has guaranteed to do in you, he has promised to do over a lifetime.

2. **Impossibly High Goals:** Impossible goals are either super-human or lack achievable pieces. Impossibly high goals can also result from expecting good things that are not a good fit for your personality or skill set. God gives you the grace to be a finite human being (i.e., someone with limits). God also made you with particular aptitudes and his design for your life is primarily within those aptitudes.

Pay attention for times when you condemn yourself for not being a different “kind of person.” Restrict your daydreaming about things that are at odds with your personality or gifting. When overwhelmed break a task down into smaller, achievable tasks.

3. **Personalization:** Everything is not “about you.” That’s an encouraging sentence; not a put down. Often our depression-anxiety reveals that we are “owning” every disappointment in the lives of those we love or that occur around us. We simply cannot emotionally withstand being the center of our own worlds. When we illogically interpret life this way, then depression-anxiety is the only logical response.

Pay attention to when you assign blame or rejection to yourself for things that a healthy-objective person would not ascribe to you. Begin to ask yourself, “Would a ‘reasonable person’ hold me responsible for this?” about each thing that triggers depression-anxiety.

4. **Emotional Reasoning:** When we believe our emotions are true in spite of facts to the contrary this is emotional reasoning. Often the hardest things to doubt are our fears and despair. These emotions are like bad friends to whom we are fiercely loyal and believe whatever they say; that is, whatever we think while we are in these frames of mind. It is often hard for us to separate the realness of our emotions from their possible lack of truthfulness.

Pay attention to when your emotional disposition is the primary reason you believe your thoughts are true. Ask yourself, “If I had peace or hope, would I believe the same things about this situation?”

5. **Catastrophizing:** This style of worst case scenario thinking (i.e., “I’m going to die... fail out of school... be single forever, etc...”) is very frequent at the onset of a panic attack. Catastrophizing is emotional reasoning on steroids. We begin to live-emote as if our worst fear were true simply because we imagine them. The intensity of emotion and distraction from responsibilities created by this kind of thinking can create a self-fulfilling dynamic.

Pay attention to when you are making bold predictions to yourself (i.e., “This [fear] is going to happen.”). Know your chief fears and be most skeptical of your pronouncements in those areas.

6. **Dichotomous Thinking:** “It is either great or terrible. It is clearly not great, so it must be terrible.” This is the formula for dichotomous thinking. It provides two options; usually in the extreme. If the good condition is not completely met, then the bad condition is assumed. Life is lived accordingly and our emotions respond accordingly.

Pay attention to when you are using strong either-or, black-white logic. Over-simplification is not an emotionally neutral thinking pattern. If you are prone to this style of thinking, begin to pray regularly, “God, show me ‘the third way’ of thinking about things that I often rush past.”

7. **Selective Attention:** We constantly filter our attention. It would be impossible for us to give attention to every stimulus (i.e., sound, scent, touch, emotion, etc...) around us. Often depression-anxiety results when we begin to only

notice those things that are wrong or out-of-order. We screen our internal and external environment and only deem those things that are “off” are relevant or worthy of our attention.

Pay attention to when you stop noticing good things. If you do not regularly smile, feel thankful, or have a desire to express gratitude, there is a strong likelihood that your attention-filter is stuck on negative.

- 8. **Superstitious Thinking:** In children or sports fans superstitious thinking can be cute or entertaining. In real life, superstitious thinking attributes a power to our actions which can be unbearable. Many fears are rooted in the irrational belief about our ability to indirectly influence things outside of our control. Much depression-anxiety is rooted in people thinking their actions or inactions affected outcomes over which they could have had no influence.

Pay attention to when you’re thinking becomes “idiosyncratic” – a way of interpreting reality that is unique to you. If you have to explain things by saying, “I know this sounds weird, but…” it is wise to have skepticism towards the beliefs that underlie your assertion.

- 9. **Passivity:** “If I can’t [blank], then I won’t do anything.” This is a pattern of thought that often causes people to cycle between depression and anxiety. The initial passivity and sense of helplessness is experienced as depression. Once “life piles up” there are seasons of high stress to “catch up.” The near inevitable sub-par performance then has a high propensity to re-trigger a depressive-passive approach to life.

Pay attention to times when what you “can’t do” tempts you to neglect what you “can do.” Realize that the less you do, the less you will believe-feel you can do. Passivity also has the effect of reducing your number of opportunities.

- 10. **Equating Worth with Performance:** This mindset requires “salvation by works alone” for you while allowing “salvation by grace” for everyone else. It makes you your own judge; your assessment of yourself becomes more influential in your emotions than what Christ gives you in the gospel. We begin to view ourselves as God’s debtors paying back our salvation or employees earning our keep; rather than God’s children whose growth he delights in at every stage in our development.

Pay attention to when you begin to believe that God agrees with your negative self-assessments because of what you did or did not do. True guilt is easily remedied with the forgiveness Christ purchased at the cross. False guilt has no exchange. It can only be dis-believed; God honoring it with payment would only validate it.

Which of these patterns of thought are you most prone to engage? _____

What are the mental phrases for which you need to most guard against? _____

What Areas of Life Are Affected by Depression-Anxiety?

Depression-anxiety affects the world outside our mind (e.g., our physical body, relationships, and lifestyle) as it does the world inside our mind (e.g., thinking content and patterns). As you review the seven areas of life described below, understand these are merely offered as areas of examination. All of them may not be present, but they are often over-looked ways that depression-anxiety impact our lives.

- 1. **Lack of Authenticity in Relationships:** “How are you today?” can be a loaded question. Honesty requires a longer answer than the friend anticipated. Dishonesty reinforces the idea that “no one understands” and, thereby, leads to a deterioration in the quality of friendship. Honesty can make your emotions the center of the friendship more than is healthy. Dishonesty reinforces the belief that you’re a burden to others. One of the main topics of this seminar will be how to have healthy relationships when your emotions are unhealthy.

Where have you seen deterioration in your relationships? _____

2. **Toll on Your Body:** Depression-anxiety is hard on you. Emotions are not just emotional experiences. They are also physical experiences. Your entire body, not just your brain, is influenced by the experience of prolonged depression-anxiety.

"[Effects of anxiety and stress include] physical and emotional exhaustion, depression, heart disease, stroke, depletion of calcium from the bones, immune system vulnerability, immune disorders, cancer, gastrointestinal problems, eating problems, weight gain (especially around the abdomen), diabetes, pain, sleep disturbances, sexual and reproductive dysfunction, self-medication and unhealthy lifestyles, damage to the brain causing hippocampal atrophy, killing of brain cells, memory loss and diminished concentration... acceleration of the aging process (p. 166-167)." Archibald Hart in "Stress & Anxiety" *Caring for People God's Way*

What physical symptoms of depression-anxiety have you experienced? _____

3. **Decreased Attention Span:** Emotions are hard to ignore. They tend to be front-and-center in our mind. This means that whatever else we may need to give our attention to has a competitor. Like the throbbing of an injured toe which distracts us even when we're not walking on it, emotional pain makes everything harder to do even when the task has no direct-emotional-relevance.

When have you found it increasingly difficult to concentrate? _____

4. **Interpretation of Events:** Our emotional dispositions influence our cognitive interpretations. On a "good day" we hear things more optimistically than we do on a bad day. When our mood is stuck in a depressive-anxious state cynicism, suspicion, or pessimism begin to be the filter of all in-coming information. The result is our mood begins to spiral in on itself because it is so difficult for anything good to penetrate our interpretive shield.

What dispositions tend to most frequently distort your interpretation of events? _____

5. **Lifestyle of Avoidance:** Everything begins to feel like it requires "too much" of us, so we begin to avoid particular responsibilities or relationships as a misguided form of self-preservation. The isolation and lethargy that ensues allows depression-anxiety to barricade our life from any outside influences which would threaten its existence. Activities that would be satisfying and relationships that would be stimulating are construed as burdens (see point #4 above) and we are alone with our pain.

"By its very nature fear tells you to run rather than face whatever is causing it (p. 1)." Ed Welch in *When I Am Afraid*

Where have you noticed yourself avoiding people or responsibilities? _____

6. **Lifestyle of Escape:** This is avoidance-on-steroids. With escape an individual begins to try to check out of life in general. Alcohol, drugs, prescription medication abuse, a fantasy world like pornography or video games, and ultimately suicide becomes ways to escape life. The longer we spend unplugged from life the easier it is to believe that we could never engage "the real world" (which becomes a purely negative phrase).

What habits have you begun or contemplated as a form of escape? _____

7. **Less Enjoyment of Normal Pleasures:** Depression-anxiety can make it feel like all the crayons in the box are grey. All the things that each brought unique pleasures, now feel "blah." In many ways it is this loss or pleasure that is directly related to the loss of hope – the most painful aspect of depression-anxiety. It is one thing to be thirsty (i.e., sad), but it is another thing to be thirsty and discover that every beverage has lost its ability to quench thirst (i.e., bring joy).

What things that you once enjoyed have lost their ability to satisfy? _____

Conclusion

Does your experience of anxiety-depression seem larger than it did before you worked this step? It may. But even if it does, remind yourself of a few things.

1. Nothing you reflected upon added to your experience.
2. Understanding your experience equips you to change your experience.
3. However large your depression-anxiety may be, God is larger.

Even by reading this material you are taking the step of challenging your thinking patterns and breaking any habit of avoidance which may be present. As you conclude this chapter, take the additional step of using the questions below to reinforce what you've learned by sharing your responses with members of your care team.

Accountability Focus (ACKNOWLEDGE):

With each step, we will provide questions you should invite another person to encourage you and hold you accountable with to make important changes.

- What aspects of your depressive-anxiety experience do you see as sinful?
- What thinking patterns which reinforce depression-anxiety are you most prone to?
- What lifestyle patterns are you engaging which reinforce your struggle with depression-anxiety?

With each step, we advise you to confide at least one new element you are learning about your emotional struggle to your accountability partner. These commitments are preliminary to chapter six “life restructuring” but serve to build progress while you get to that point.

- _____
- _____

Chapter 3.

“Where Does My Fear-Despair Come From?”

UNDERSTAND the origin, motive, and history of my sin.

“I do not know all I need to know about myself or my struggle with depression-anxiety.

I do know that my heart resists being known (Jeremiah 17:9), and that fear-despair reveals the things that are most important to me (Luke 6:45).

I am coming to realize that [list] desires lead me to fear-despair, and that [list] experiences have contributed to the strength of those desires.

I believe God is more satisfying than those desires could ever be without Him.”

Memorize: John 14:1 (ESV), “Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me.” As you memorize this passage reflect upon these key points:

- “Context” – Jesus was aware that his disciples were troubled, and he comforts them rather than scolds them.
- “Let not” – Jesus points out the influence the disciples had over their emotions as part of his comfort to them.
- “Your heart” – Jesus identifies the heart (i.e., the “self” we refer to as our mind) as where our fear-despair resides.
- “Be troubled” – Troubled is a good description to capture the experience of both depression and anxiety.
- “Believe” – Our thoughts and values are a primary battle field on which we engage depression-anxiety.

Teaching Notes

“Our emotions tell us what we really, really believe (p. 128).” Brian Borgman in *Feelings and Faith*

“Fear and anxiety make a prediction... We fancy ourselves as prophets, and we keep trusting in our predictions even though they don’t come to pass. Fear and worry are prophecies (p. 9).” Ed Welch in *When I Am Afraid*

“As physicians are prone to say, it can be as important to know what type of person has the disease as what disease the person has (p. 121).” Mark Yarhouse, Richard Butman, and Barrett McRay in *Modern Psychopathologies: A Comprehensive Christian Appraisal*

“The challenge is placed for me therefore to look to my own heart and see if this is the case for me [emotions having their root in sin]. Maybe my doctors would look at the question this way: to what extent do your desires and fears and activities trip you up so as to let mental illness gain a foothold? Maybe where they would say desires, I would say misplaced desires; where they would say fears, I would say faithless fears; where they say activities, I would say disobedient acts (p. 108)... I find it hard to believe that a biological deficit in my brain could make me more of the center than I already am (p. 109).” Kathryn Greene-McCreight in *Darkness Is My Only Companion*

“Much of the increase in depression and anxiety today is largely the result of an unbalanced lifestyle where people are, on the one hand, working too hard and spending too much and, on the other hand, are exercising, resting, and sleeping too little (p. 55).” David Murray in *Christians Get Depressed Too*

“People who believe they should be better than they are can’t be happy, because they are morbidly preoccupied with themselves (p. 26)... We will always be disappointed with life (or others) when we ask it to do something it wasn’t designed to do (p. 34)... When we put our hope in or expect something or someone other than him to fill us and make us happy, he will surely frustrate us. But he doesn’t do it to punish us. He does it to rescue us from our disordered attachments and delusions, and from ourselves (p. 35).” Leslie Vernick in *Lord, I Just Want to Be Happy*

“We can all too easily confuse what we desire with what is desirable, satisfy the superficial and starve the essential traits of our nature, love absolutely what we should love relatively, and love relatively what we should love absolutely. We can be on a fool’s errand after fool’s gold (p. 22).” David Naugle in *Reordered Love, Reordered Lives*

Embedded Study

This is the chapter where we trace the smoke back to its fire. Hopefully the steps you’ve taken to understand your experience of depression-anxiety have equipped you to begin to answer the “why” question more accurately. Too often, in the intensity of our emotion, we come to the “why” question as a form of desperation; wanting deliverance more than an answer that would make the next step in our journey clearer.

One of the benefits of slowing this journey down with steps is that it allows us to arrive at the “why” question in a different frame of mind. We can come to it intentionally and with the information necessary to make a sound assessment; instead of being drug to it as a “question of last resorts.”

In this chapter, we will explore the why question in three sections.

1. Our Personal-Family History of Anxiety-Depression
2. Biology and Our Anxiety-Depression
3. Our Cognitive-Emotional Motives for Anxiety-Depression

The first two areas of assessment reveal experiences of anxiety-depression which are more rooted in suffering than sin. If you find the primary explanation for your emotions in these sections, it is advised you switch to the compliment to this study which examines how Scripture speaks to anxiety-depression as a suffering experience.

The third section looks at how our beliefs, values, and lifestyle contribute to our experience of anxiety-depression. These are areas over which we bear personal-moral responsibility. This section will set up the remaining steps in this seminar, which examine how Scripture speaks to anxiety-depression as a sinful experience.

Our Personal-Family History of Anxiety-Depression

Our families influence us in two ways: the genes we inherit and the values-lifestyles we have as our “default life setting.” In this section we will look at the latter; we will also consider how the personal experience of trauma can contribute to anxiety-depression. In the next section, we will examine biological influences.

Before we examine how one’s family history contributes to your experience of depression-anxiety, let’s consider how to think about this influence. We should want to know what to do and what not to do with the assessments we’re making. Read the quote below twice. First, read it as it is written. Second, read it replacing the phrase “peer pressure” with “hunger” changing the latter adjectives to fit the context (e.g. “accepted” to “full;” “liked” to “tasty”).

“Peer pressure comes from within you. You want to be accepted and liked. It’s more about what you want than what other people actually say, do, or think (p. 14).” Ed Welch in *What Do You Think of Me? Why Do I Care?*

“Hunger comes from within you. You want to be full and eat tasty food...”

This parallel works if we’re combatting gluttony. Gluttony does come from within you and your inordinate cravings would reveal moral-character problems. However, the parallel would not work if it were speaking to a poverty context. Hunger would still come from within, but an exaggerated focus on food would not be a moral-character deficiency.

As you examine your family influences, this is a distinction you will need to assess. Yes, depression-anxiety comes from within you. Yes, your family likely influenced you in ways we’ll detail below. What you need to assess is whether that influence was the equivalent of poverty; abuse or neglect? If so, it is better to deal with your struggle in the suffering paradigm compliment to this study. If not, then the insight you gain in this section will help you see more clearly what you will be assessing in the third section of this chapter.

1. **Values / Expectations:** One of the first things we learn from our families are values and expectations; even when we disagree with them it can be very difficult to shake the way our home of origin’s sense of “should” impacts our emotions. This difficulty accounts for why so many who shake their family’s values do so in extreme ways; the emotional force required for this kind of change does not easily allow for minor shifts.

Ask yourself, "How do/did my family's values and expectations influence my experience of depression-anxiety?"

The three forms values and expectations below can help you identify this type of family influence.

- a. **Comparative Thinking:** Much of our unnecessary emotional wear-and-tear comes from comparing ourselves to others. For many people this habit began because their parents deeply cared about how their child "ranked" to his/her peers (i.e., academically, athletically, popularity, appearance, etc...). Whether the parents love was conditional or not, the frequency of verbal reference reinforces a pattern of comparative thinking that carries significant emotional weight.

To begin combatting this contributor to depression-anxiety, embrace these truths, "God made everyone with strengths and weaknesses. In God's eyes we are not competing with one another, but stewarding the lives he gave us. God designed us to fulfill the purpose for which he made us, so none of our weaknesses will impair our ability live out his will, which is the essence of a fulfilling life."

- b. **Busyness or Passivity:** As we grow up we acclimate to a level of activity that feels "normal" to us. This can be healthy or unhealthy. On the unhealthy side, you can be comfortable being too busy and fill your life with stress, or be comfortable being too passive and perpetually feel like "life asks too much." Expect any adjustments in this arena to feel like a form of culture shock.

To begin combatting this effect, ask yourself these questions, "What are the basic responsibilities I must fulfill to function well? What pace of life best fits my aptitudes and personality? What 'extra' activities are most important to me in this season of life?" Use your answers to determine your schedule and provide contentment towards the absence of those things that don't make the cut.

- c. **Entitlement:** A family has an attitude about the things they have (i.e., either earned or graced), the things they do not have (i.e., deserved or content), and the things others have (i.e., either jealous or pleased). These attitudes towards the blessings of life will either be an emotional net-gain (i.e., peace and hope) or emotional net-loss (i.e., anxiety-depression) whether our circumstances are good or bad.

To begin combatting these attitudes meditate on the following passages: Job 2:9-10, Matthew 5:45-48, and James 1:16-18. Begin to thank God for every blessing that you see in the life of someone else (1 Thess. 5:18). If this is difficult, do not stop out of fear of hypocrisy but ask God to make you grateful even for his grace expressed in the life of others.

Read 1 Corinthians 13:11-13. We often only think of this passage romantically and, therefore, have a tendency to think it only applies to marriage. But a discussion of the power of love is highly relevant to family life. Why do families influence us so much? Because they are, or at least should be, a context of love. Notice Paul's application in this passage. It is about putting away childish thinking patterns. Adults identify problems and change them; children merely imitate actions and passively adopt values. Paul allows for childish thinking when we're children. But as adults he calls us to see our life more clearly and change, as needed, by the grace of God.

2. **Lifestyle / Coping Skills:** Values and expectations take on behavioral expressions; lifestyles and coping skills (which may or may not be healthy). We tend to focus on our emotions more than the lifestyles that provoke them.

Ask yourself, "What are the ways that I respond to life's challenges that make them worse or delay progress?"

Use the three common, but unproductive lifestyles and coping skills below to help you in this assessment.

- a. **Worry / Grumbling:** At any given moment we are going to think about something. And we're not smart enough to have new, fresh thoughts every moment. This means we are either going to rehearse the blessings or challenges of life. God calls us to rehearse our blessings (Psalm 103:2) for our protection as much as his praise. Rehearsal is a universal thinking pattern; it is the content of what is rehearsed that is unique between different people.

To begin combatting a tendency to worry and grumbling realize that your objective is not to “stop thinking.” Creating a cognitive void – emptying your mind of all thought – is not the same thing as peace and hope. Identify things you enjoy thinking about. Unless it is a time when you can correct a stressful life circumstance focus your attention on the things you enjoy.

- b. **Self-Pity:** What is self-pity? It’s a word that is often used poorly. Self-pity is when we wallow in our unpleasant circumstances believing we are powerless to affect positive change. Often when we feel like we cannot directly change “what is most important to us” we mistake this to mean that we cannot change “anything.” Self-pity becomes a way for people to soothe their own conscience for not doing the things they could be doing to better their circumstances.

“Self-pity is easily the most destructive of the non-pharmaceutical narcotics; it is addictive, gives momentary pleasure and separates the victim from reality.” John Gardner

To begin combatting self-pity, do not try to combat self-pity. That is like the fly that uses another leg to push against the sticky fly trap and only gets another foot stuck. Instead, pick a suggestion from another section of this material that is relevant to your struggle and begin doing that.

- c. **Avoiding Unpleasant Emotions:** This is the passive side of “If it feels good do it.” Many families teach this model of addressing life’s challenges. Initially, as children, we dislike this approach because it meant when things upset us our parent-protectors were more concerned with quelling the emotions than caring for us. But as adults we now perpetuate the approach because choose not to address unpleasant experiences; now the cure (e.g., focusing on the struggle in order to resolve it) scares us more than the problem afflicts us.

You are already combating this pattern by working through this material. Be encouraged and don’t stop!

Read Ephesians 5:15-16. We begin to realize how important and uncomfortable Paul’s instruction to “look carefully then how you walk” really is. Unless we examine our life this way, we will live “as unwise” people; following the unhealthy patterns we have learned. We must examine how we use our time; not just productivity levels, but our cognitive-emotional hygiene habits as well. The momentum of our internal nature (our flesh) and external surroundings (the world) will not naturally move us towards what is healthy and holy.

3. **Trauma / Triggers:** In this section we want to identify when anxiety-depression is rooted in a traumatic experience(s) or its subsequent triggering experiences. The suffering-based compliment to this study will provide some guidance on processing and recovering from these experiences. But, the more intense the trauma, the more you would need to identify a resource or counselor to address your emotional-social struggle from a post-traumatic perspective.

The evaluation in chapter one should have helped you identify the symptoms of post-traumatic stress; specifically questions 51-60. These are indicators that your present anxiety-depression is the result of the way that present triggers (i.e., sights, sounds, experiences, etc...) draw back these emotions – not unlike an aroma or song can call back a memory.

Part of this process will entail developing a robust practical theology of suffering and God’s care for sufferers. But it will also involve identifying the times when your responses are heightened, the types of associations your triggers have developed, and how to relax your body and free your emotions after these heightened responses.

Biology and Our Anxiety-Depression

Our biology can influence our anxious-depressive experience in several ways. First, we can be predisposed, based upon our genetic makeup, to be more sensitive to anxiety-depression than others. Some personalities withstand risk, failure, and rejection better than others. As the skin of different people has various levels of tolerance for sunlight, emotions of different people have various levels of tolerance for uncertainty or disappointment.

These differences should not be reduced to brain chemistry; many other aspects of our physical bodies also contribute to these differences. In Appendix A and the resource at www.bradhambrick.com/mentalillness we provide guidance on how to assess and address struggles rooted in our biology in this way.

Second, we can habituate our bodies to respond to situations with anxiety-depression. Our emotions can be trained to respond as faithfully as the saliva glands of Pavlov’s dogs; consider about how you relax when you sit in your favorite chair, or how you tense up when you start to balance your check book. These are habituated emotional responses.

In these instances, psychotropic medications can decrease the intensity of the experience, but you will need to learn healthier ways to respond to the emotionally-habituated situations in order to resolve the unpleasant emotions. The strategies suggested in steps six and seven are designed to facilitate this process.

Third, anxiety-depression changes our bodies in ways that produce more anxiety-depression. Anxiety produces free radicals and corticosteroids that have many negative health effects; including high blood pressure, accelerating degenerative diseases and the aging process. Corticosteroids activate the adrenal system, which explains why anxiety initially gives you an energy boost, but if perpetually activated results in adrenaline-exhaustion that feels like depression.

These effects should add to your motivation to continue in this study. Once your depression-anxiety levels return to normal these effects will no longer be present.

Our Cognitive-Emotional Motives for Anxiety-Depression

It may seem odd to many people to consider that we have motives for emotions like anxiety-depression. It is more natural to think of motives for actions (e.g., greed for robbing a bank; compassion for rescuing a puppy) or highly reactive emotions like anger (e.g., “I didn’t get my way, so I got angry”). But we must let go of the notion that emotions “just happen,” as if they appear out of nowhere, unprompted like a ghost. If this is truly happening for you, it is reason for a medical checkup.

Most often we will be able to identify events that violate our expectations or preferences which prompt our emotions. These events do not cause our emotions, but rather reveal our motives. How we respond to the gap between our circumstances and our expectations-preferences is our moral responsibility; to respond in a way that is unhealthy for you, dishonoring towards others, or untrusting of God is sin.

That is good news. We cannot change past events or, often, even control present ones. If that was God’s requirement, there would be no hope for our depression-anxiety. But there is forgiveness for sin and we can allow our expectations be shaped by God’s Word, so that we are totally forgiven and increasingly free from the unpleasant emotions.

The next step in that process – both repentance and freedom – is identifying the motives for your emotions. In this section, we will group motives under three headings: I want..., I believe..., and I trust. As you prepare to examine yourself in light of this material, consider this extended quote from Eugene Peterson.

“Here’s how it works. It is important to observe that in the formulation of this new Trinity that defines the self as the sovereign text for living, the Bible is neither ignored nor banned; it holds, in fact, an honored place. But the three-personal Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is replaced by a very individualized personal Trinity of my Holy Wants, my Holy Needs, and my Holy Feelings.

We live in an age in which we have all been trained from the cradle to choose for ourselves what is best for us. We have a few years of apprenticeship at this before we are sent out on our own, but the training begins early. By the time we can hold a spoon we choose between half a dozen cereals for breakfast, ranging from Cheerios to Corn Flakes. Our tastes, inclinations, and appetites are consulted endlessly. We are soon deciding what clothes we will wear and in what style we will have our hair cut. The options proliferate: what TV channels we will view, what courses we will take in school, what college we will attend, what courses we will sign up for, what model and color of car we will buy, what church we will join. We learn early, with multiple confirmations as we grow older, that we have a say in the formation of our lives and, within certain bounds, the decisive say. If the culture does a thorough job on us – and it turns out to be mighty effective with most of us – we enter adulthood with the working assumption that whatever we need and want and feel forms the divine control center of our lives.

The new Holy Trinity. The sovereign self expresses itself in Holy Needs, Holy Wants, and Holy Feelings. The time and intelligence that our ancestors spent on understanding the sovereignty revealed in Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are directed by our contemporaries in affirming and validating the sovereignty of our needs, wants, and feelings.

My needs are non-negotiable. My so-called rights, defined individually, are fundamental to my identity. My need for fulfillment, for expression, for affirmation, for sexual satisfaction, for respect, my need to get my own way – all these provide a foundation to the centrality of me and fortify my self against diminution.

My wants are evidence of my expanding sense of kingdom. I train myself to think big because I am big, important, significant. I am larger than life and so require more and more goods and services, more things and more power. Consumption and acquisition are the new fruits of the spirit.

My feelings are the truth of who I am. Anything or person who can provide me with ecstasy, with excitement, with joy, with stimulus, with spiritual connection validates my sovereignty. This, of course, involves employing quite a large cast of therapists, travel agents, gadgets and machines, recreations and entertainments to cast out the devils of boredom or loss or discontent – all the feelings that undermine or challenge my self-sovereignty.

In the last two hundred years a huge literature, both scholarly and popular, has developed around understanding this new Holy Trinity of Needs, Wants, and Feelings that make up the sovereign self. It amounts to an immense output of learning. Our new class of spiritual masters is composed of scientists and economists, physicians and psychologists, educators and politicians, writers and artists. They are every bit as intelligent and passionate as our earlier church theologians and every bit as religious and serious, for they know that what they come up with has enormous implications for everyday living. The studies they conduct and the instruction they provide in the service of the god that is us, the godhead composed by our Holy Needs, Holy Wants, and Holy Feelings, are confidently pursued and very convincing. It is very hard not to be convinced with all these experts giving their witness. Under their tutelage I become quite sure that I am the authoritative text for the living of my life.

We might suppose that the preaching of this new Trinitarian religion poses no great threat to people who are baptized in the threefold name of the Trinity, who regularly and prayerfully recite the Trinitarian Apostles’ and Nicene creeds, who begin prayers with the invocation, “Our Father...,” who daily get out of bed to follow Jesus as Lord and Savior and frequently sing, “Come Holy Spirit, heavenly dove. . . .”

But this rival sovereignty is couched in such spiritual language, and we are so easily convinced of our own spiritual sovereignty, that it does catch our attention. The new spiritual master assure us that all our spiritual needs are included in the new Trinity: our need for meaning and transcendence, our wanting a larger life, our feelings of spiritual significance – and, of course, there is plenty of space to make room for God, as much or as little as you like. The new Trinity doesn’t get rid of God or the Bible, it merely puts them to the service of needs, wants, and feelings. Which is fine with us, for we’ve been trained all our lives to treat everyone and everything that way. It goes with the territory. It’s the prerogative of sovereignty (pg 31-33).” Eugene Peterson in *Eat This Book: A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading*

- I. **“I want...”** Often depression-anxiety has an active-pursuing motive. There is something we want and do not get so we respond with fear or despair. A temper-tantrum is not the only unhealthy and immoral emotional response we can have to disappointment. But, often because anger is the primary emotion children use to respond to disappointment, adults miss that their fear-despair can also be an emotional revolt against things not going their way.
 - a. **Control / Autonomy:** Often depression-anxiety is the result of wanting more independence to shape our life than we actually have. We want events and relationships to conform to our preferences or ideals and if they don’t, we experience depression-anxiety.

If this motive is strong for you, begin by reflecting on Isaiah 48:17-19.
 - b. **Acceptance:** Another dominant motive for anxiety-depression in our culture is over-valuing the approval of others. We move from enjoying people (healthy community) to needing people (unhealthy codependency). It is normal to be hurt, but for many people rejection-conflict, or even the possibility of this rejection-conflict, can lock them in a state of chronic depression-anxiety.

If this motive is strong for you, begin by reflecting on Proverbs 29:25.
 - c. **Pleasure:** A tell-tale sign of an inordinate desire for pleasure is busyness; either because of the number of extra-curricular activities engaged or the number of hours worked to fund pleasures. When we sacrifice our ability to live with peace and hope in our pursuit of pleasure two things are true: we’ve made an idol of pleasure (unholy) and we’re making a bad trade (unhealthy).

If this motive is strong for you, begin by reflecting on Hebrews 11:23-28.
 - d. **Ease / Comfort:** For some the basic responsibilities of life (e.g., caring for family, work, maintaining a home, etc...) are perceived as “too much to ask.” These fundamentals of life are responded to as if they were perpetually being

asked to "go the extra mile." This form of laziness causes all of life to be seen as a burden or stressor and result in generalized anxiety-depression.

If this motive is strong for you, begin by reflecting on II Thessalonians 3:9-13.

- e. **Immediacy:** This is chronological comfort instead of situational comfort. In an era when technology allows everything to become increasingly fast and efficient, it is easy to lose the serenity that comes with valuing delayed gratification and contentment. This motive can also be particularly strong for individuals with a highly organized, systems-oriented personality.

If this motive is strong for you, begin by reflecting on Hebrews 10:35-36.

- f. **Select Justice on Demand:** A preoccupation with when God is going to rectify a particular offense can create a life under-girded by depression-anxiety. We can easily reduce God's trustworthiness to the aspect of temporal justice that is more important to us. When this wrong is not promptly righted we begin to feel like we live in an unsafe world overseen by an un-good God.

If this motive is strong for you, begin by reflecting on Psalm 37:7-9.

Read Ecclesiastes (yes, the whole book). The entire book of Ecclesiastes is one long book of motives for the pursuit of peace, hope, and happiness; or, said differently, the escape from anxiety-depression. As you read, realize this is the journal of a very wise and influential person. Realize your motives are not new and your disappointment in what they cannot provide is not unique. Be encouraged that someone has walked your same path, experienced the same emptiness, and learned where to find the security and fulfillment you're seeking.

"Needs are looked upon today as if they were holy, as if they contained the quintessence of eternity. Needs are our guides, and we toil and spare no effort to gratify them. Suppression of desire is considered a sacrilege that must inevitably avenge itself in the form of some mental disorder... We feel jailed in the confinement of personal needs. The more we indulge in satisfactions, the deeper it is our feeling of oppressiveness. We must be able to say no to ourselves in the name of a higher yes (p. 163)." Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel in the 1950's as quoted by Leslie Vernick in *Lord, I Just Want to Be Happy*

- 2. **"I believe..."** Other times, unlike "I want" motives, our depression-anxiety has a self-protective motive. There is an undesirable outcome and we believe our depression-anxiety can protect us from and makes our emotions "worth it." This is the emotional equivalent of the child who is so afraid of getting their skinned-knee cleaned with a disinfectant wipe that he is willing to endure the injury getting infected.

- a. **Perfectionism as Moral Teflon:** Depression-anxiety can result from trying to assuage our conscience with our performance. We live by the motto, "If I do good enough, then I cannot be blamed." If we're exceptionally talented this can feel like it works for a while. But eventually we either wear out or fail, and our emotions respond with the full-weight of the condemnation we thought we were staving off.

If this motive is strong for you, begin by reflecting on II Corinthians 5:11-21.

- b. **Redemption through Overcoming:** If we do not try to stave off depression-anxiety with our performance (see above), we may try to reclaim what has been lost with our performance. We want to "make things up" to those we've hurt, or prove that an under-privileged upbringing will not hold us back. These are not bad things, but when these become the foundation of our emotions or the basis of our identity, we lose the ability to rest in these good pursuits. The result is inevitable depression-anxiety.

If this motive is strong for you, begin by reflecting on Matthew 11:28-30.

- 3. **"I trust..."** Another question that can reveal the motive of our depression-anxiety is "To whom do I run when I am upset?" Anxiety-depression can as easily be motivated by allegiance as the desire to obtain or avoid something. However, the flimsiness of whatever we rely upon in place of God inevitably gives way to depression-anxiety.

- a. **Myself:** In our day of self-reliance, the first place we are told to turn is within. When life gets too hard, we try to get stronger. While additional motivation and confidence are good for those who are prone to premature discouragement, this is the equivalent of saying, "When you can't run any further, start sprinting." Even the Christianized versions of this approach treat God more like a steroid than a refuge; a physical trainer than a father. The result is a magnified version of the emotions that come in response to "do more."

If this motive is strong for you, begin by reflecting on Romans 12:1-3.

- b. **Others:** When we rely on others as the answer for our depression-anxiety we grow codependent during our struggle (expecting them to be our deliverer) and bitter after our struggle (angry that our source of refuge failed us). Living “in” community is very different from living “on” community. When we turn to others to quell our emotions, our fear-despair deepens as we realize they are inadequate for the task.

If this motive is strong for you, begin by reflecting on Psalm 1 on being rooted in God.

- c. **Possessions:** Banks, the nicest building in most towns, are like temples for the modern god of money. We buttress what we believe will provide security and hope. Possessions can be a direct motive (i.e., my security is measured by my networth) or an indirect motive (i.e., money provides what I need to appease other motives / idols on this list).

If this motive is strong for you, begin by reflecting on I Timothy 6:9-11.

Read Psalm 56:3-4. As you read these verses, notice one thing. God wants us to run to him when we are afraid. He does not want us to muster more faith to calm down and come to him when our pupils are no longer dilated. He wants us to come when we are afraid, so he can be our source of true comfort. The problem with the “I trust...” motives is not that they are inherently bad, but that they distract or delay us from coming to “the God of all comfort” (II Corinthians 1:3).

Conclusion

The goal of this step is to allow you to see yourself more accurately “in real time.” When we are experiencing anxiety-depression is it hard to see ourselves and our situation accurately. When our assessment is distorted it is unlikely that our efforts at resolving these emotions will be effective.

The journaling tool on the next page is designed to help you do two things in the midst of each significant depressive-anxious experience you have.

1. Gather the relevant information you’ve learned to assess during the first three steps.
2. Gather information that will allow you to be more equipped to effectively implement the remaining steps.

This should be very encouraging. You can now begin attacking your depression-anxiety. Whereas, before you likely felt like depression-anxiety happened to you and you were its victim until it chose to leave. Now, depression-anxiety will not be able to enter your life without you gathering important information that will become part of the remedy. The battle may still be hard, but the momentum is shifting in your favor.

Accountability Focus (UNDERSTAND):

With each step, we will provide questions you should invite another person to ask you openly and to confront any contradiction between your words and life.

- What steps do I need to take to begin combatting the family-environmental causes of my emotions?
- If there are reasons to believe your anxiety-depression has a biological cause, have I seen my doctor?
- What are the leading motives that contribute to your experience of anxiety-depression?

With each step, we advise you to confide at least one new element of your emotional struggle to your accountability partner. These commitments are preliminary to chapter six “life restructuring” but serve to build progress while you get to that point.

- _____
- _____



DEPRESSION-ANXIETY JOURNAL

STEP ONE: ADMIT:

What was the situation? Summarize the “who, what, before-after, and where” of your depression-anxiety.

How did I react? Summarize the content of your thoughts and the choices you made.

STEPS TWO & FIVE: ACKNOWLEDGE & CONFESS:

What are the consequences? Who was affected (directly or by changed expectations) by your emotions?

What forms of thinking under-girded your depression-anxiety? Circle all that apply

Being Idealistic
Catastrophizing
Passivity

Impossibly High Goals
Either-Or, Black-White Thinking
Equating Worth with Performance

Over-Personalizing
Selective Attention
Comparative Thinking

Emotional Reasoning
Superstitious Thinking
Self-Pity / Entitlement

STEP THREE UNDERSTAND:

What are my motives? Circle or write in your motive/trigger.

“I want...”
... control / autonomy
... acceptance
... pleasure
... ease / comfort
... immediacy
... select justice on demand

“I trust...”
... in perfectionism as moral Teflon
... in redemption through overcoming

Other:

“I believe...”
... in myself
... in others
... in possessions

STEP FOUR REPENT:

How would God have me run to him in this experience? What do repentance and faith look like now?

STEPS SIX & SEVEN: RESTRUCTURE LIFE & IMPLEMENT:

How did I leave myself susceptible to this struggle? What change is needed to prevent this?

What strategies to managing my depression-anxiety would be most effective in this situation?

Are aspects of this struggle do I need to share with a friend, pastor, or counselor?

Chapter 4.

“Returning to My One True Refuge”

REPENT TO GOD for how my sin replaced and misrepresented Him.

**“My anxiety-depression reveals counterfeit gods mocking my true Savior.
I am beginning to see how offensive my anxiety-depression can be to God and
how much pride I express trying to be/replace God.
I repent not merely because my emotions hurt other people or disrupt my life, but
because God is superior to my false gods and lovingly enables me to love Him (1 John 4:19).”**

Memorize: Acts 3:19-20 (ESV), “Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus.” As you memorize this passage reflect upon these key points:

- “Repent... turn back” – The core meaning of “repent” is not “feel very bad” but “make a U-turn” back to God.
- “Blotted out” – God has no intention of shaming you with your sin. Instead, he wants to free you from false idols.
- “Times of refreshing” – Our anticipation of repentance should feel like the longing for a refreshing bath.
- “The presence of the Lord” – Repentance is what reconnects us with the source of our strength and hope.
- “May send the Christ” – Repentance unlocks the door of our life to unleash the return of the hero, Christ.

Teaching Notes

“The particular trouble with which we are dealing tends, I find, to be common among those who’ve been brought up in a religious manner rather than in those who have not been brought up in a religious manner. It is more likely to affect those who’ve been brought up in Christian homes and families and who have always been taken to a place of worship than those who have not (p. 24)... They often concentrate on the question of sanctification, but it does not help them because they have not understood justification. Having assumed they were on the right road, they assume that all they have to do is to continue along it (p. 25).” D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones in *Spiritual Depression*

“The change is rarely a matter of knowledge. It is a matter of repentance. We have chosen a path apart from God; repentance is the process of turning back. We have chosen a different story, filled with subtle lies about God, questioning his love, care and compassion. Repentance means to renounce her story and believe that there is only one Storyteller. God alone is authorized to interpret our lives (p. 259).” Ed Welch in *Depression, A Stubborn Darkness*

“Much of our misery is caused by the stories we tell ourselves about how things should be... She created an internal storyline of how things should go—and when they didn’t go the way she thought they should, she felt sorry for herself (p. 23).” Leslie Vernick in *Lord, I Just Want to Be Happy*

“One of the most important things Jesus will ever say to you is, ‘I am with you.’ That is the treatment for fear, and the only thing that could jeopardize his presence is your sin and shame. If he has dealt with that problem, you never have to fear that he will leave you (p. 60).” Ed Welch in *When I Am Afraid*

“The right answer is rarely your only answer. Instead, you usually have at least two sets of answers: those that are ‘right,’ and those that actually guide the way you live (p. 22)... The only way you can change the focus of your worship is to find something even better to focus on. That is your task (p. 48).” Ed Welch in *What Do You Think of Me? Why Do I Care?*

“The knowledge of God comes first. Apart from this personal knowledge, scriptural advice is no different from the thoughts stoppage or imaginary vacations this secular treatments offer (p. 64)... Consider faith this way: it means that we give up. Faith says, I need Jesus. It is not a work, it is an act of desperation, and you are certainly familiar with that (p. 221)!” Ed Welch in *Running Scared*

Embedded Study

Let’s play with the double entendre (e.g., word or phrase with two meanings) “emotional repentance” for a moment. Many readers may be thinking, “My emotions are already down, why do you want me to repent? How does feeling bad about feeling bad help me feel any better?” The difficulty with this logic is that it confuses “feeling bad about something” with repentance; God does not forgive us because we are emotionally self-lacerating. That is masochism not the gospel.

The image behind the Hebrew word for repent is “U-turn.” When we repent we change directions. In step three, you came to understand the motive behind your anxiety-depression. In this step, you will turn from those empty-promising idols back to the God who wants to be your refuge, hope, strength, and Savior.

Until you grasp this picture of God and repentance, this step will feel like you’re being asked to fight fire with fire; depression with despair or fear with desperation. After you grasp what God is offering you will realize it is like putting down a glass of salt water for a glass of fresh water.

To help you on this part of your journey, we will examine repentance in three ways.

1. To Whom Are You Repenting?
2. Key Elements of Repentance
3. A Sample Prayer of Repentance

In the first section we want you to see that repentance is a relationship before it is an activity. In the second section we want you to understand the actions that comprise complete repentance. In the final section we want to help you get used to talking to God this way about your depression-anxiety.

To Whom Are You Repenting?

Often we do not repent because we have a wrong view of God. We know what we’re doing is self-destructive. We want to live differently. But our sense God’s greatness and holiness, which we perceive as threatening, cause us to avoid our only source of hope. We are much like Jill before Aslan (representing Christ) in *The Silver Chair*.

“Are you not thirsty?” said the Lion.

“I am dying of thirst,” said Jill.

“Then drink,” said the Lion.

“May I — could I — would you mind going away while I do?” said Jill.

The Lion answered this only by a look and a very low growl. And as Jill gazed at its motionless bulk, she realized that she might as well have asked the whole mountain to move aside for her convenience.

The delicious rippling noise of the stream was driving her nearly frantic.

“Will you promise not to — do anything to me, if I do come?” said Jill.

“I make no promise,” said the Lion.

Jill was so thirsty now that, without noticing it, she had come a step nearer.

“Do you eat girls?” she said.

“I have swallowed up girls and boys, women and men, kings and emperors, cities and realms,” said the Lion. It didn’t say this as if it were boasting, nor as if it were sorry, nor as if it were angry. It just said it.

“I daren’t come and drink,” said Jill.

“Then you will die of thirst,” said the Lion.

“Oh dear!” said Jill, coming another step nearer. “I suppose I must go and look for another stream then.”

“There is no other stream,” said the Lion.” C.S. Lewis in *The Silver Chair*

In this part of the book, Aslan had no intention to harm Jill as she drank. But she could not have the water of life without him. Similarly, even though God is for us in our fear-despair we are often too intimidated to approach him. God can no more dim his majesty than the sun can turn down its brightness. But we must come to him to find the relief our soul desires. In this section we will examine three views of God that can cause people not to come to God in their anxiety-depression.

God as Unemotional

Some people view God as non-emotional; like an ancient idol made of stone. Why would we come to someone who was as emotionally-unaware as Spock from Star Trek for relief from depression-anxiety? We would be stared at with a gaze that says, “This does not compute,” and leave feeling worse about our already painful emotions.

Theologically, this view can be reinforced by what is called God’s immutability (e.g., the reality that God is unchanging; the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow). The logic is that since emotions are fluctuating and God is unchanging, then he must not have emotions. But God is described throughout Scripture as having emotions; emotions that are consistent – anger towards injustice, compassion towards suffering, affection towards his people, etc...

For others, their hesitancy is rooted in something much more personal. It is not that they think God cannot care, they believe God does not care about them. Worse than being angry at them; God is believed to be indifferent towards them. They think God hears their prayers like we respond to a tragedy on the news; in principle it’s sad, but because there is nothing we can do and there are so many tragedies, we are unmoved.

Regardless of which misconception you have, the correction is the same – you need to understand that God cares deeply and cares deeply for you. When we fail to see how much God cares for us repentance becomes a sterile plea bargain in a heavenly court system; a formality you need to do before you die in order to avoid the “stiffer consequences” of Hell. But, as important as that may be, it would not seem relevant to our day-to-day emotional struggles.

Read Hebrews 2:14-18. Notice how important Jesus’ compassion is for the gospel. God was not merely concerned to pay the full price for our sin (e.g., propitiation) so that we could get into heaven, he was also very concerned that we know he understands our struggles, so that we would want to be near him. Heaven is not meant to be an eternal all-inclusive vacation where there is so much to enjoy we never get bored. Heaven is about being with our heart’s-desire, God himself, so the gospel must contain this kind of emotional-relational concern.

God as Unapproachable

Maybe God has emotions and can understand, but he is too busy for me. In this misconception, God is the parent returning e-mails (i.e., answering prayers) as fast as he can, not wanting to be bothered by his own children who are asking for help. When you consider coming to him in prayer, you imagine God snapping, “Can’t you see I’m busy! I’ve got an entire universe to care for. What do you need that is THAT important!?”

Who is going to come with a concern when they feel like their request is intrusive? The rejection and shame would only make the depression and anxiety worse. It would make sense to continue trying to handle it on my own, even if I didn’t know what that meant and it wasn’t working.

Read Psalm 147:2-11. Notice how God responds to the brokenhearted, wounded, and humble. Use your imagination. Picture the God represented in this passage. Picture yourself coming to this God with your concerns. Picture God responding to you in the ways described in this passage. Replay these images in your mind until coming to God seems like the most appealing and natural thing you would do with your every concern.

God as Mean

Neither unemotional nor unapproachable is as bad as the possibility that God is just plain mean. In this misconception, God actually gets a kick out of our anguish. God has a “serves them right” attitude. In this view God is not just angry at sin but mean to sinners.

If this is your view, then it may be hard to express it without getting angry; an indication that you do not feel safe with God and rely on the courage anger provides to speak. It is important for you to realize that God is more concerned about your misconstrued image of his character than whatever idol your anxiety-depression may reveal.

This is not because God is insecurely consumed with his own reputation, but because he knows that it is only by knowing him rightly that you will connect with the hope he offers. God holds his nail-pierced hand out to you like a kind person does not a starving, scared, abused puppy. The kind person is not insulted by the puppy's fear, but moved by compassion; knowing he cannot care for the puppy as it needs unless it learns his true character and trusts him.

Read Romans 2:4. Notice that it is the kindness of God that brings us to repentance. This is what accounts for the risk of repentance. The outcome is guaranteed; God has already promised forgiveness. We hesitate not because we doubt the offer, but because the doubt the character of the one making the offer. Before moving to the next section on the key elements of repentance, realize your ability to have this conversation will be directly proportional to how much you trust the character of the one you're having this conversation with.

Key Elements of Repentance

There is no formula for repentance. The six points below are merely meant to help you experience the full redemptive impact of repentance. In this sense, repentance and God's forgiveness can be like a smart phone. They have many features that we may not know are present or how to utilize. When we buy the phone, we get them all; but we do not get the full benefit of them until we realize they're there and how to use them.

After each point, we will offer an area of self-assessment. These questions are meant to help you determine whether you are placing yourself in a position to receive the benefits God intends to provide through each aspect of repentance.

1. **A desire to live for God and submit to His Lordship.** Repentance does not begin with remorse. If that were the case, then we would be saying the cure for feeling bad begins with feeling worse.

Repentance begins with a passionate desire to submit to God's Lordship out of trust for His character. It is the “falling short” of this desire that sparks the genuine remorse of true repentance. But this remorse is not “icky” like shame, instead it is like the sense of reunion with a trusted friend after you realize you were wrongly upset with them and they graciously embrace the friendship again.

- Self-Assessment: Are you surrendering to the Lordship of Christ because you trust his love for you or are you only seeking relief from unpleasant emotions?

2. **An understanding of how our sin sought to replace God.** It is not just actions or distorted motives for which we repent. We repent for having replaced God with ourselves. The idols that fuel our depression-anxiety want to control our lives and interpret all the events in our lives. They make God out to be the villain. Repentance acknowledges this false worship as affront to God and wants him to have his rightful place in our lives.

- Self-Assessment: Were you able to see the “against God” nature of your sin in the motive assessment from chapter three? What did you learn and what was hardest to acknowledge?

3. **Brokenness over the nature of our sin.** Healthy emotions begin with recognizing of our fallen human condition. Ultimately we sin because we are sinners. The myriad of factors that led to our sin are not the root cause. The root is that our nature has been distorted by the Fall (1 Cor. 15:21-22).

True repentance is not just sorrow over particular idols but brokenness over our condition as a sinful person. When we acknowledge our depravity, we gain an accurate self-assessment that allows us to rely on God in the way that genuine repentance requires and creates the non-shame-based honesty in which real relationships thrive.

- Self-Assessment: Do you resist seeing yourself and allowing yourself to be known as someone who is in perpetual need of God's sustaining grace?

4. **Expression to God.** After sin our instincts cause us to hide from God rather than talk to God (Gen. 3:8). Too often we think that a directionless sense of regret for sin is the same thing as repenting to God.

You will not feel restored to God as long as you are avoiding God because of your sin. It does no good to address your repentance to “to whom it may concern.” Any ambiguously addressed repentance is little more than talking to yourself differently. Talk to God when you repent so that you can know His response to your repentance.

- Self-Assessment: Have you talked to God in your repentance? If not, might it be that your repentance seems ineffective because the “no one” you spoke to can have no power to forgive?

5. **Faith in God’s willingness to forgive.** Repentance is an expression of faith. We come to God with nothing to offer in exchange for our forgiveness. If we do not believe God will forgive, we will continue in our “try harder” or “hide more effectively” approaches that allow depression-anxiety to fester.

All this does is inadvertently reinforce the idea that our sin is good and God is mean. Unless we believe that God is willing to forgive on the basis of His grace and Christ’s death, then repentance becomes the continuation of an unhealthy relationship with a never-pleased, always demanding deity.

- Self-Assessment: How do you view God (i.e., expression on His face, posture of His body, tones when He speaks, words that He says, gestures of His hands) when you come to God in repentance? This question will be very important for the material below. Take extra time to reflect on it.

6. **New direction of life usually expressed first by confession.** What this looks like will be clarified more in chapters five and six. Repentance is our part of entering into or recommitting to a covenant relationship (i.e., like marriage) with God. This is why sin is frequently called spiritual adultery. Repentance is our vow-renewal ceremony that expresses our renewed commitment to covenant fidelity. In this sense, repentance provides the assurance of acceptance and protection for which depression-anxiety beg.

- Self-Assessment: Does it startle you to think of repentance as a vow-renewal ceremony? How does that image extend the implications of repentance beyond the moment of prayer?

A Sample Prayer of Repentance

There is no magic in these words or this outline. The intent is to help you assimilate the what you’ve learned from the first four chapters in a repentant conversation with God before you begin allowing these insights to permeate your life by having confessional conversations with other people (chapter five) and crafting an action plan to restructure your life in a way that is less hospitable for depression-anxiety (chapter six).

Take this sample and use it as a conversation outline with God. As you talk with God, review through your notebook and verbalize what you have learned. Know that God is interested in what you are saying; not because you have finally “learned your lesson” but simply because he cares for you (1 Peter 5:7).

Heavenly Father,

I am glad I can come to you in the midst of my experience of depression-anxiety. I have been hesitant to come to You, because...

[describe your misconceptions about God and/or repentance]

I also haven’t wanted to admit the full extent of my struggle with depression-anxiety. I have not wanted to admit it to myself or to you.

[describe what you saw about yourself in chapters one and two]

I am beginning see how the things that have become more important than you (i.e., idols) are filling my life with anxiety-depression without providing the relief they promise.

[list your motives from chapter three and describe how you have lived for them]

You know how those things came to be so precious to me. You know what I need (Matthew 6:8). Where my desires are good, I trust you to provide. Where my desires are bad or excessive, I ask that you would change me in whatever ways necessary.

[talk about how this scares and/or confuse you]

I have replaced You in my life with my fears. I have declared myself more capable of caring for me than you. I see how wrong and foolish that is. Please forgive me.

[talk with God about the six elements of forgiveness]

Thank you for loving me and walking with me through these unsettling emotions (Psalm 23). I look forward to learning more about your character as I strive to trust and rely on you more in my daily life. Lord, grant me the perseverance to continue on this journey even when I’m emotionally weary. Even though this road with you may be hard, the side roads without you are harder. I know this. Help me not to forget it.

Amen.

Accountability Focus (REPENT):

With each step, we will provide questions you should invite another person to encourage you and hold you accountable with to make important changes.

- Do I seem to be viewing God accurately or in a distorted way biased by my emotional struggle?
- Have I evidenced a willingness to embrace each of the six elements of repentance?

With each step, we advise you to confide at least one new element you are learning about your emotional struggle to your accountability partner. These commitments are preliminary to chapter six “life restructuring” but serve to build progress while you get to that point.

- _____
- _____

Chapter 5.

“I Don’t Want to Battle Alone Anymore” CONFESS TO THOSE AFFECTED and enlist help.

**“I have not represented God well in your presence. [List]
You have been effected by my un-God-like emotions, attitudes, and beliefs. [List]
My goal in life is to make God’s character known.
That starts with this request for forgiveness.
I value our relationship more than my pride.
I am currently working on submitting my life to God’s control and
understand if you need time to consider my request for forgiveness.”**

Memorize: Philippians 4:6-7, 9, 12 (ESV), “Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus... Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you... I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.” As you memorize this passage reflect upon these key points:

- “Do not” – Outside the context of Paul’s relationship with these people this command seems emotionally unrealistic.
- “Guard your hearts” – One way God guards our hearts is to call us to break the barriers of shame and isolation.
- “From me” – Paul reveals that his readers had seen him need to implement everything he was instructing them.
- “Practice” – Notice the patience. God realizes that we will not automatically “get right” everything we learn.
- “In need” – Paul honestly identifies with their challenges in order to help them feel less alone with their fears.

Teaching Notes

“When we’re the main character of our storyline and it is all about us, then we justify pursuing what we think makes us happy, even if it makes those around us... very unhappy. But we will never find true happiness at the expense of others. That will only lead to more heartache (p. 29).” Leslie Vernick in *Lord, I Just Want to Be Happy*

“Any journey back to the kingdom of God must go through confession. Anxiety is a string around our finger reminding us that money has become our refuge... Confession acknowledges that we still invest in both kingdoms, hoping to minimize our risk (p. 163).” Ed Welch in *Running Scared*

“Impatience is a form of unbelief. It’s what we begin to feel when we start to doubt the wisdom of God’s timing with the goodness of God’s guidance... The opposite of impatience is not a glib denial of loss. It’s a deepening, ripening, peaceful willingness to wait for God in the unplanned place of obedience, and to walk with God at the unplanned pace of obedience—to wait in his place, and to go with his pace (p. 171).” John Piper in *Future Grace*

“Worry does not empty tomorrow of its sorrow. It empties today of its strength.” Corrie Ten Boom

“Over time, Eve had become extremely focused on her own problems and needs. She spent most of her waking hours thinking about her desire to be healthy. The change had come so gradually that she barely noticed it, but she had become amazingly self-centered. If she was going to escape the sadness that had come with her losses, she was going to have to switch her focus from herself to other people (p. 117).” Charles Hodges, M.D. in *Good Mood Bad Mood*

“You can’t promise them that you will never experience another manic episode. But you can tell them your goal is to learn to love and listen to others in all circumstances, including mania (p. 16).” Ed Welch in *Bipolar Disorder*

Embedded Study

It is easier to see why we need to confess sins like anger or lust to others; these are sins that are more clearly *against* another person. But whatever lack of faith or self-destructiveness is present in anxiety-depression seems to be much more internally corrosive than externally offensive. This is not as true as we are prone to believe – rarely can we be emotionally disrupted and loving optimally – but it is a good place to start this conversation.

The pursuit of forgiveness is not the only reason we should confess our sin. However, if forgiveness is the only reason that comes to mind when you think about confession, then this chapter will likely produce a reaction of defensiveness or shame. These are the very emotions that push away from others instead of towards them. Unless we combat this misconception we’ll be fighting an uphill battle in this step.

Confession is what invites other people into our lives and points out to them where they can help. Confession is how we acknowledge our weakness and admit that we need their help. Confession is what ensures others that we have the humility and realistic expectations necessary to be safe to help. Confession is the door to community; the door through which we much enter if we do not want to be alone in the dark with our emotions of depression-anxiety.

Simply put; we confess to others because it is good for our pursuit of righteousness as much as because we’ve sinned. Often, with confession, we are like the child who is offended by their parents telling them to eat the vegetables so they can be “big and strong.” We perceive the remedy as an insult highlighting that we are “small and weak.” It makes sense, but as long as we think that way we’re trapped.

In this chapter you will be asked to go to the people in order to confess:

- Your weakness and need for help
- How your depression-anxiety caused you to mistrust God
- How your depression anxiety led you to neglect, offend, or control them
- How your depression anxiety resulted in your living in unhealthy ways

You’ve been honest with yourself (steps 1-3) and honest with God (step 4). Now you need to be honest with those around you (this step) in order to put yourself in the best position to enact lasting change (steps 6-8) and enjoy it (step 9). In order to help you take this pivotal step well, we’ll examine the subject of confession in two sections.

1. How to Confess
2. Preparing for Confession

Read James 5:16. Notice that this command is given in the closing section of James’ letter. It is a general call to every believer. Unconfessed sin is “abnormal” in the biblical depiction of the Christian life. When we experience as normal, what Scripture depicts as abnormal, we should expect significant disruptions in our life, relationships, and emotions. Confession is one way we stop trying to make dysfunctional functional in our relationships.

How to Confess

How many things that we need to do on a daily basis come less naturally than confession? The prevalence of our need to confess to others can blind us to our lack of aptitude. Like a chore we do not enjoy, we feel like we’ve done more than enough when the job is simply “done.” Our discomfort tempts us to ignore the quality of our work.

In this section, we want to borrow from Ken Sande’s book, *Peacemaking for Families*, where he develops seven key elements of confession (bold text only). This captures well the key elements of a conversation of confession. At the end will be a tool to help you prepare for these conversations.

1. **Address Everyone Involved.** One of the questions you have already examined is, “Who has been affected by my experience of depression-anxiety?” You are in a unique position to model for these individuals what faith looks in when battling with depression-anxiety. These are likely the people close enough to care about you and you care about them.

This conversation will be a profitable time of helping these people decipher sin from suffering and responsibility from affliction in the experience of anxiety-depression. Use what you learned about these differences in steps one through three to shape how you confess. You should confess those parts of your experience that are sin and ask for support for those parts that are suffering.

- Return to the depression-anxiety survey in chapter one and the “areas of life affected” section in chapter two. Make a list of each name mentioned or that comes to mind as you review those materials.

2. **Avoid If, But, and Maybe.** As you speak this will be an important time to solidify what you need to “own” and “not own” as your responsibility. Whereas with anger words like if, but, and maybe reveal blame-shifting on the other person; with depression-anxiety these words reveal what you believe God needs to forgive (sin) and what God needs to comfort (suffering).

If you are speaking of an area that God needs to comfort, do not couch it in confessional language.

- Example 1: “If I was scared because of the car wreck, then I’m sorry.”
- Example 2: “I should have trusted God to provide, but there was no money to pay the mortgage.”
- Example 3: “Maybe I could just think less about... [particular trauma].”

Instead use language that reveals you are learning how to trust God in this situation. These statements are not confession but requests for prayer, encouragement, or assistance.

- Example 1 Reframed: “Pray for me as I learn to trust God again when I’m in a car in thick traffic.”
- Example 2 Reframed: “Help me think through how to rework my finances in light of these new medical bills.”
- Example 3 Reframed: “Pray God would give me extra strength/comfort when... [trigger for traumatic response].”

Compare and contrast examples 1, 2, and 3. _____

But, if you are speaking of any area that God needs to forgive, do not allow your confession to become a non-confession by the usage of the words if, but, and maybe.

- Example A: “If I neglected you when I rarely came out of my room for those three months, then I’m sorry.”
- Example B: “I shouldn’t have said you were not working enough, but when I’m afraid I freak out about finances.”
- Example C: “Maybe next time I’m depressed I should tell someone before I become suicidal.”

Instead these statements should own what happened.

- Example A: “I failed to fulfill many responsibilities and allowed our friendship to become one-sided.”
- Example B: “I should not have allowed my fears about money to recast how hard you were working.”
- Example C: “You could not know how bad I was hurting because I didn’t tell you and that put you in a very bad situation when you found out.”

Compare and contrast examples A, B, and C. _____

3. **Admit Specifically.** One goal of confession is to help our friends and family make sense of their world accurately. When we fail to admit the specific ways depression-anxiety resulted in us violating healthy relationship we create confusion or resentment in their world. We place them in a position to either accept unhealthy as normal or argue with us (either out loud or to themselves).

Being specific also helps us and them to identify where “doing better” should be evident first. When our confession is generic we have little guidance on where our efforts to honor the relationship should begin. Inadvertently, being perpetually happy or excited becomes the standard we feel compelled to meet in order to fulfill our confession. That is unrealistic and often situationally-inappropriate.

In these ways being specific in our confession does two things: (a) it reveals to our friend that we are a “safe” person who can talk about needed changes in our life without falling into self-pity or blame-shifting, and (b) it helps us identify more realistic expectations of what change will look like and when it should occur. The exercise below is meant to help facilitate this aspect of confession and several other aspects coming later in this chapter.

- Use the “web diagram” exercise (see Figure 1) to identify the specific sinful actions or attitudes you are confessing – “Ring B” in the example below. We will use the Rings D and E in the next point of this section.
- Instructions and Sample: A sample web diagram is provided below using concentric circles (a different version of the same exercise that is easier to read in a type-print format). In this sample we will follow anxiety-depression rooted in an exaggerated desire for control that is negatively impacting a family.
 - A. Write each ruling desire / motive you identified as strong in your life (step three) in the center of a blank piece of paper.
 - B. Out from that motive draw lines and write the sinful actions you commit to obtain this desire. How do you violate healthy relationship and honoring God in attempts to obtain this desire?
 - C. From each of the actions draw lines and write specific occasions when you have sinned in this way – when have the actions from “Ring B” occur?
 - D. From each occasion of sin draw lines and write the type of impact this had on your friend or family member – how are the lives of those I care about different because of the events of “Ring C”?
 - E. From each impact draw lines and write the evidences of this impact in the life of your friend or family member – what changes do I see, direct or indirect, that reveal the “Ring D” changes have occurred?

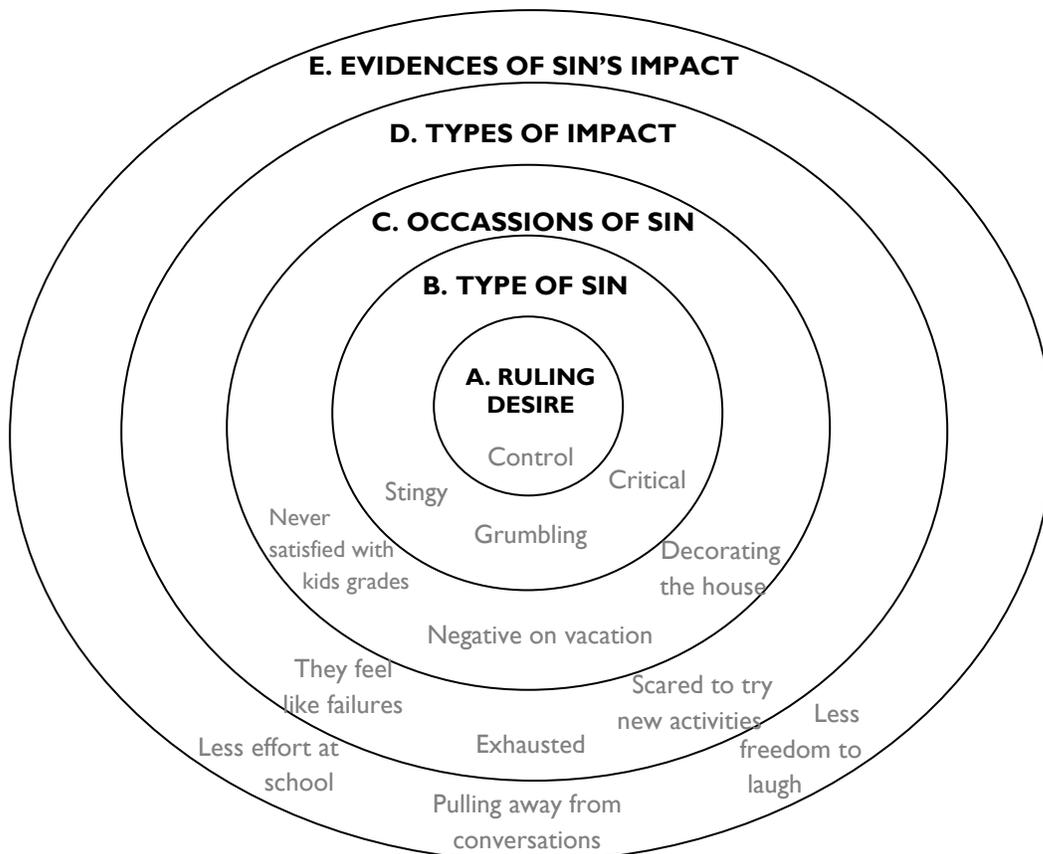


Figure 1: The Five Rings of a Web Diagram to Prepare for Confession

4. **Apologize (Acknowledge the Hurt).** Sin has consequences; both intentional and unintentional. Confession expresses empathy and takes responsibility for the dominoes that result from the trigger event of our sin. This is not groveling or penance; both of which are emotionally manipulative and reveal the “value” we place on our sin. The “value” of sin is Jesus’

death on the Cross. By contrast, this exercise is an exercise in other-mindedness. Resistance to expressing empathy reveals that the self-centeredness that made our sin seem reasonable in the moment of sin is returning.

- Complete with Rings D and E of your "web diagram" if you have not already.
- Your goal in confession is to represent God more accurately to the person your sin has offended. God is compassionate and understanding to our hurts (Psalm 56:8). Therefore, our confession should include evidence that we have reflected on the impact of our sin.
- When sharing this aspect of your confession avoid using verbs of completion (i.e., "I know..."); instead use process verbs (i.e., those ending in "-ing," for example "I am learning..."). Avoiding verbs of completion allows the other person to talk about other ways our sin has affected them without it feeling like they are "piling on" to what we have already said "I know."

5. **Accept the Consequence.** Confession is not a plea-bargain or the beginning of a negotiation. If you have been suicidal, then consequences may entail restricting access to medication, guns, and knives. If you have been controlling with finances, then consequences may entail allowing your spouse to administrate the budget.

But it is important to remember that consequences are not punitive. Consequences can play a disciplinary role (reinforcing life lessons and solidifying prevention measures) or a trust-building role (providing tangible fruit for an otherwise unverifiable desire to change). However, when we are confessing, we should not have the primary say in defining what is punitive, disciplinary, or trust-building.

- Begin by stating the obvious. If there are clear changes you need to make, state them in your confession. Do not phrase them as, "I will do [blank] for you," as if it were a favor or concession, or "If you insist, I will [blank]," portraying change as punishment. It is more in keeping with confession to say, "Because I see my need to change, I will [blank]."
- End by asking an open ended question. Honest questions are a sign of humility. They reveal that we are not presenting a contract or deal, but that we are seeking to restore a relationship and our life to a state of healthiness. A simple, "Are there other ways I can show you the sincerity of my desire to change or help you trust me in the areas I've brought unhealthiness into our relationship?" would suffice.

6. **Alter Your Behavior.** Confession is not the culmination of the journey. It is merely the drawing of the map and acknowledgement that the map is needed. There has been a great deal of emotional energy spent to get to this point, and that is why many people stop their travels at the step of confession. But when we stop at confession our lack of effort gives the person reason to say, "You didn't really mean what you said." This is why our study still has four more chapters to go.

- **Read Luke 14:28-33.** Part of embracing the Gospel is counting the cost of following God and embracing the sacrifice. Obviously, it's worth it. We give up our life of sin and its misery. We gain a life of being transformed into what God intended and Heaven. But it feels painful and often we want to back out because of our doubt. The same is true with confession, because it is rooted in the Gospel paradigm of dying to self and living for God's glory through serving others. As you prepare to confess, realize this dynamic is part of the emotional battle.

7. **Ask for Forgiveness & Allow Time.** "I'm sorry" is not the same thing as asking for forgiveness. "I'm sorry" is an appropriate statement after a mistake or a misfortune. "Will you forgive me?" is the appropriate statement when we have sinned against another person or your sin affected another person. Be sure you are requesting forgiveness and not merely asking to be excused.

It is also important to remember that while forgiveness is commanded by God, Scripture never calls on the confessing party to remind others of this command or to insist that it be obeyed on a certain time table. If your sin created mistrust in the other person, then you honor them by being patient. Impatience only exacerbates mistrust. While Scripture commands them to forgive, it does not command them to trust. This is an additional grace they give you.

- Allow at least as much time as it took you to come to repentance. It is hypocritical to expect someone else to process suffering (your sin against them) faster than you acknowledged and committed to change your sin.

- During the interval between confession and granting forgiveness, love and serve the other person while continuing to work on your personal change. This helps you remain other-minded and it honors your friend.

Preparing for Confession

What does it look like to walk through these seven points in a conversation? So far this chapter has felt more like a teaching outline than a dialogue. In this section, we will seek to correct that.

On the next page is a tool to help you outline the conversations you need to have.

1. Begin with the list of people you made under “Address Everyone Involved” above. Print one copy of the confession guide for each person on the list. Write the name of each person at the top of one edition of this guide (PDF copies available at www.bradhambrick.com/anxiety).
2. The top paragraph is meant to overview for you the flow of this conversation. It does not need to be spoken, but is a kind of map to help you not get lost in the details.
3. Complete the open-ended statements that follow using your notes from earlier chapters and the work you did on your web diagrams.
4. If you are concerned about whether you succumb to blame-shifting or self-pity during your confession rehearse confessing with a mentor or counselor.
5. Request a time to meet with each person and follow through with your confession.

Read Philemon. This short letter tucked in the back of the New Testament is a prepared confession. Paul came to learn of how Onesimus, prior to becoming a Christian, had stolen from Philemon, his employer at the time. Onesimus later became a Christian under Paul’s teaching. Paul sent this letter with Onesimus when he returned to make things right with Philemon. So if you are wondering if this kind of action is necessary or biblical, realize that it was important enough that God devoted a book of the Bible as an example of what you are preparing to do.

Accountability Focus (CONFESS):

With each step, we will provide questions you should invite another person to encourage you and hold you accountable with to make important changes.

- Am I resisting confessing to someone to whom I should confess?
- Can I rehearse my confessions without getting off message (i.e., self-pity or blame-shifting)?

With each step, we advise you to confide at least one new element you are learning about your emotional struggle to your accountability partner. These commitments are preliminary to chapter six “life restructuring” but serve to build progress while you get to that point.

- _____
- _____



CONFESSION GUIDE

Name of the person to whom you are confessing: _____

“I have not represented God well in your presence [explain]. You have been hurt by my un-God-like emotions, attitudes, and beliefs [describe]. My goal in life is to make God’s character known. That starts with this request for forgiveness. I value our relationship more than my pride. I am currently working on submitting my life to God’s control and understand if you need time to consider my request for forgiveness.”

I am now willing to admit that I sinned against you by... [list specific sins and avoid words like if, but and maybe]. These actions were my choice and wrong. Review Rings B and C of your web diagrams.

I am learning to see how much my life was ruled by the desire for [list motives for your sin]. You did not cause my sin. Refer to the relevant motives from chapter three and Ring A of your web diagrams.

I am beginning to see how my sin has affected you. [Describe] Describe what you can understand of how your sin negatively affected the life, emotions, trust, and relationships of this person – Rings D and E of your web diagrams.

I know I must change to honor God and to bless those I care about. Because I see my need for change, I will [list obvious needed changes]. I am still learning what other changes honoring God will require of me. State those changes that are foundational.

Are there other ways I can show you the sincerity of my desire to change or help you trust me in the areas I’ve brought unhealthiness into our relationship? [pause and take notes on their answer] This section should be blank until you speak with the person.

I understand if it will take some time but I am asking for your forgiveness. Thank you for showing me the honor of listening.

Chapter 6.

“Making Room for Peace and Hope in My Life”

RESTRUCTURE MY LIFE to rely on God’s grace and Word to transform my life.

“I have learned a great deal about my self [list with examples], my sin [list examples], and my Savior [list with examples]. Because of these truths I want and need to make the following changes [list]. My temptation is to see these changes as ‘what I do’ rather than merely cooperating with and celebrating God’s grace in my life.”

Memorize: Matthew 6:33-34 (ESV), “But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.” As you memorize this passage reflect upon these key points:

- “Seek first” – Is what you are seeking first producing peace, fear, or despair? We can judge a pursuit by its fruit.
- “All these things” – Don’t succumb to thinking that you have to constantly remind God of what you’re facing.
- “Do not be anxious” – Anxiety is “owning” responsibilities that belong to God or will only be yours in the future.
- “Tomorrow will” – Punishing yourself over things you must do but can’t touch is useless self-torture.
- “Sufficient for the day” – The only way to impact tomorrow positively is to live today well.

Teaching Notes

“There is no perfect way to climb out of a negative mindset or a toxic pit, but climbing you must (p. 58).” Leslie Vernick in *Lord, I Just Want to Be Happy*

“Act on the grace God gives you today, and wait confidently for the grace God will give you tomorrow (p. 20)... Fear and anxiety always want more information. They think that knowledge is power. In response, your heavenly father confides in you [Scripture]... He is giving you what your fears and anxieties are asking for. He is giving you information about the future (p. 23).” Ed Welch in *When I Am Afraid*

“Freedom resolves the fear and anxiety associated with persecution and oppression, but it increases the fear of personal failure, which is one reason Soren Kierkegaard said that anxiety is the dizziness of freedom. With freedom comes more choices, which means more opportunities to get it wrong. Freedom or oppression – pick your poison. They both contribute to our fears and anxieties (p. 21).” Ed Welch in *Running Scared*

“Owners are the ones who do all the worrying; stewards simply listen to the owners desires and work to implement them. Owners are responsible for the outcome; stewards strive to be faithful (p. 133).” Ed Welch in *Running Scared*

“She must learn to handle the painful emotions that come with losses and disappointments in a different way, without falling into her habits of self-pity, resentment, or self-hatred (p. 24)... For many of us busyness is an intentional way to avoid reality... Busyness always dulls awareness, which is why it's one of Satan's favorite ploys... One of the most important skills we must learn if we want to feel happier is how to take responsibility for our choices (p. 84).” Leslie Vernick in *Lord, I Just Want to Be Happy*

“The right kind of fear is a weapon powerful enough to overcome the wrong kinds of fear (p. 142).” Elyse Fitzpatrick and Laura Hendrickson in *Will Medicine Stop the Pain?*

“One problem with masks and walls is that, though their purpose is to protect you from hurt, they hurt you even more because they don’t allow relationships (p. 26).” Ed Welch in *What Do You Think of Me? Why Do I Care?*

“When the thing we dread is upon us, we usually do well. Anticipation is the killer (p. 139).” Ed Welch in *Running Scared*

Embedded Study

Depression-anxiety crowds out peace and hope in our lives. Conversely, peace and hope can crowd out depression-anxiety from our lives. The more space we allow for one set of emotions the less room we will have for the other. This inverse relationship sets up the approach we will take in this chapter.

We will take a two-fold approach – advocating strategies that decrease depression-anxiety and strategies that increase peace-hope. It is recommended that you implement a “balanced diet” – relatively equal numbers of approaches of each type.

This chapter is a buffet. If you consider every strategy presented to be an assignment, this chapter will overwhelm you. As you read, select those strategies that best fit your life circumstances, the dynamics of your struggle, and your personality. If you are working through this material with a friend or counselor, invite them to suggest which strategies they believe would have the largest impact.

To help you select a balanced set of strategies we have divided this chapter into six sections. Some of this material will be crystalizing and making more actionable what you have already learned. Other parts will be fresh applications of the gospel-truths we have been building upon.

1. Immediate Negative Emotion Response Plan
2. Stewarding Your Body
3. Extended Negative Emotion Response Plan
4. Life Management
5. Pursuit of Joy Plan
6. Strategic Spiritual Disciplines

Immediate Negative Emotion Response Plan

Starting well is the first part of finishing well. What you have learned about yourself and your depressive-anxious experience should allow you to identify the onset of these unpleasant emotions earlier in their development. Knowing the thought patterns and triggers that undergird them should allow you to begin combatting these emotions before they gain significant momentum in your mind and heart.

The approaches below are meant to provide key elements of an immediate negative emotion response plan.

1. **Refuse to Beat Yourself Up:** Shame exacerbates depression-anxiety. Even if your depression-anxiety is rooted in sin, there is hope. Even if your struggle with depression-anxiety has been long, it does not need to define you. Shame is a form of emotional surrender.

Simple statements like “my emotions are not my identity” and “my emotions do not determine my value” can create the emotional freedom to embrace the hope and grace God offers. The hymn “Before the Throne of God Above” captures the essence of this strategy.

When Satan tempts me to despair,
And tells me of the guilt within,
Upward I look, and see Him there
Who made an end of all my sin.

Whatever guilt or shame your sin merited was absorbed by Christ on the cross. Your battle against depression-anxiety rooted in sin begins with accepting this gift and living in the freedom it provides.

Read Galatians 5:1-2. One significant purpose of Christ’s death on our behalf was to purchase this type of emotional freedom for us. Too often we feel like it “honors” God to punish ourselves for our sin. This is the equivalent of thinking it honors someone giving you a gift card to your favorite restaurant by fasting. You honor Christ by embracing the emotional freedom from shame he intended to give in order to live more of the life he intended for you to live.

2. **Restate and Reframe the Question:** We live and die by the questions we ask. We use questions to explore our world, so our questions necessarily move us in particular directions.

What are the questions that your depression-anxiety most naturally wants to ask?

What are the unhealthy or doubting assumptions embedded in these questions? _____

Which of these questions best replaces or counters your natural questions?

- What is my next step of obedience? (instead of looking at everything that needs to be done)
- What will God do next? (reminding yourself to include God’s involvement in your expectations)
- What parts of this situation am I responsible for and what parts must I trust God or someone else to fulfill? (avoiding the all-or-nothing trap with personal responsibility)
- Other: _____

How would your experience of depression-anxiety be different if these were the first questions you asked?

Read Psalm 42. Notice that in verse 5 the psalmist examines and challenges the questions behind his emotions. Notice that in verses 9 through 11 this dialogue continues as he wrestles with false thoughts and the truths that should (but had not yet) replaced them. Notice that Scripture invites this kind of in-process dialogue with God as we run to him with our doubts and fears. It is much easier to change and reframe our questions when we are not ashamed to allow God to be part of the conversation.

3. **Run to God; Not Away from Hope:** The most significant thing about any emotions is where it leads you; towards or away from God. The inability to emotionally rest often reveals that we are running from something. The ultimate component of any “negative emotion reaction plan” is – where will you run when you experience anxiety-depression? If you know you can run to a safe place, this is great protection against panic-despair.

“Faith is the refusal to panic (p. 143).” D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones in *Spiritual Depression*

This is another way of saying – pray. But too often prayer is viewed as a mere good deed in a hopeless situation instead of a refuge in the midst of an onslaught of an already defeated enemy. In the former, prayer is the epitome of re-arranging the deck chairs on the Titanic. In the latter, prayer is two things: (a) God’s tender availability in the midst of a real struggle, and (b) our reminder that we engage this struggle with real assurance.

Read Psalm 46. Notice that the context of God being a refuge in the presence of trouble (v. 1). In the rest of the psalm many different descriptions of anxiety-depression provoking circumstances are listed. God asks us to focus on his presence with us (v. 7) and says one of the fruits / gifts of his presence is the ability to be still (v. 11). When you face anxiety-depression train yourself so that your first instinct is to run towards God.

Often people struggle to run towards God in these circumstances because they doubt his character. They wonder if God is really “for them.” These two conversation excerpts from *The Hiding Place* by Corrie Ten Boom capture elements of God’s character. The context of these conversations is her father, Casper Ten Boom, comforting Corrie as she faced bullying in school and then the possibility of dying during the Nazi oppression in World War II.

“Father, what is sexsin?” He turned to look at me, as he always did when answering a question, but to my surprise he said nothing. At last he stood up, lifted his traveling case from the rack over our heads, and set it on the floor. ‘Will you carry it off the train, Corrie?’ he said. ‘It’s too heavy,’ I said. ‘Yes,’ he said. ‘And it would be a pretty poor father who would ask his little girl to carry such a load. It’s the same way, Corrie, with knowledge. Some knowledge is too heavy for children. When you are older and stronger you can bear it. For now you must trust me to carry it for you.’ And I was satisfied. More than satisfied – wonderfully at peace. There were answers to this and all my hard questions. For now I was content to leave them in my father’s keeping.” Corrie Ten Boom in *The Hiding Place*

"I burst into tears, 'I need you!' I sobbed. 'You can't die! You can't!' 'Corrie,' he began gently. 'When you and I go to Amsterdam, when do I give you your ticket?' 'Why, just before we get on the train.' 'Exactly. And our wise Father in heaven knows when we're going to need things, too. Don't run out ahead of him, Corrie. When the time comes that some of us will have to die, you will look into your heart and find the strength you need – just in time.'" Corrie Ten Boom in *The Hiding Place*

Stewarding Your Body

Emotions are both cognitive and physical realities. Emotions occur both in our immaterial mind (i.e., that little voice in our head) and our material bodies (i.e., both in our brain and the rest of our bodies). How you care for your physical body will either greatly assist or greatly hinder your battle with depression-anxiety.

1. **Reduce Caffeine:** Stimulants and anxiety do not get along. In addition to increasing psychomotor agitation (creating a sense of unrest and fidgety-ness), caffeine is acidic which leads to inflammation (body discomfort that agitates depressive-anxious tendencies) and dehydration (interferes with proper brain and body functioning, which can be a trigger for anxiety and depression).

Depression and disrupted sleep patterns do not get along. Caffeine also disrupts the REM and non-REM sleep balance; so even if you are able to sleep with significant caffeine consumption, the quality of that sleep may be diminished.

For these reasons, the greater your struggle with depression-anxiety the more it is recommended that you limit your caffeine consumption.

2. **Regulate Sleep:** One of the most under-emphasized influences upon brain chemistry is sleep. We struggle to regulate our emotions when we do not sleep well, in large part, because sleep is when the energy stores of our brain are restored. We "feel tired" because our brain has not had its glucose levels restored.

Also, the reality testing region of the brain is restored when we sleep. This is why we become more irrational the longer we go without sleep. When a large part of our battle with depression-anxiety involves weighing the significance of events or the probability of negative thoughts, a weakening of our reality testing ability is a major disadvantage.

A third influence of sleep upon depression-anxiety, one having little to do with neuro-chemistry, is that sleep is a primary contributor to our sense of rhythm in life. When we struggle with uncertainty (a common feature of depression-anxiety) returning a sense of rhythm to life can be an important stabilizing factor.

If regulating sleep is a struggle for you consider the following:

- 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 hope and repeat it slowly as you lay down to sleep.
- Play soft music or nature sounds to help prevent your mind from 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.

3. **Balanced Diet:** A second of the most under-emphasized influences upon brain chemistry is our diet. You cannot give your body the wrong raw materials and expect it to produce neurological balance any more than you can give a chef bad ingredients and expect him to produce a good meal.

Beyond being the building blocks of physical health and neurological balance, a healthy diet is often the first step towards good self-care. People who take the time to consider how they are fueling their body typically begin to have a better self-image. Neglect of one's diet is an easy way to reinforce a negative self-image.

The implication is that a healthy diet combats depression-anxiety both neuro-chemically and via self-perception.

4. **Increase Exercise:** A third of the most under-emphasized influences upon brain chemistry is our exercise, especially cardiovascular exercise. The increased blood flow, lactic acid in the muscles, and metabolism stimulation (among other factors) of exercise all contribute to the chemical regulation of the body.

Similar to improving one’s diet, exercise also has the psychological benefit of being an emotional investment in one’s self-care. Exercise is evidence that you are caring for yourself and usually results in improvements in energy and appearance, both of which make it easier to enjoy your body.

“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.

5. **Breathe:** This technique may sound odd. But, particularly for anxiety, deep breathing can have a significant impact upon your emotions. One area that the body monitors to determine its sense of safety is the temperature of the nasal cavity. When the nasal cavity is hot, it triggers the stress response. When it cools the body turns off the stress response.

Think of the athlete who begins to breathe through his mouth as he runs. This causes his nasal cavity to heat up and triggers the adrenal system; part of the flight-fight stress response. Adrenaline provides an energy boost and intensifies his emotional state (hence the reactivity at many sporting events).

This is one reason many people feel relaxed when they smoke cigarettes even though nicotine is a stimulant. The calming power of the breathing required to rhythmically inhale a cigarette is more powerful than the medical agent in cigarettes are energizing. Awkwardly, this means many smokers are as addicted to breathing as they are nicotine; especially if their primary appeal to smoking is relaxation.

When you feel anxiety mounting it is recommend that you take a few deep breaths in through your nose (drawing in cool air) and out through your mouth (exhaling the warmer air away from you nose). This will cool the nasal cavity. It does not extract adrenaline already released, but prevents the release of additional adrenaline. In this sense, it is the emotional equivalent of taking your foot off the gas pedal of your car more than stepping on the brakes.

Extended Negative Emotion Response Plan

If we began with the “first aid” version of a negative emotion response plan, then this is the “emotional hygiene” version of that plan. There are some things that we do immediately to fix a situation in or moving towards crisis: first aid. There are other things we do to manage situations that have a propensity to become unpleasant: hygiene.

1. **Listen to Your Emotions with Doubt:** Hopefully, this is what you’ve been doing since you began this study. Too often we feel threatened by unpleasant emotions, especially when they’ve become chronic, and we try to eliminate them altogether. When we are unable to do this we feel like a failure (shame) and have a heightened sense of alarm that our emotions will be perpetually out of control.

The reality is we will never live without the experience of depression-anxiety. As we’ve illustrated several times, there are advantages to these emotions we should not want to eradicate. Begin the process of listening to your emotions by being able to make the simple statement:

- “I am experiencing depression-anxiety. I wonder what it means and what I will learn about God, myself, and others in the process of responding to this experience in a healthy way.”

Read through your journal entries you began in chapter three. It is often easier to listen objectively to old anxiety-depression than it is to fresh experiences. As you listen to previous experiences, it will help you get to know the newer experiences.

As you listen to your emotions, be careful not to accept everything you hear as “true.” Your emotional experience is “real” but not everything it declares about you, the future, God, or others is “true.” Think about it; how often have your emotions made false predictions and proclamations. Stated differently, if your emotions were a friend giving you financial advice would you put your money where their mouth is?

This disposition of doubt allows you to create some distance from your emotions. You can begin to decide what messages from your emotions are valid and which ones are distorted. You begin to live as if there is a “you” that transcends your emotions; which is an incredibly liberating mindset.

If this kind of thinking is hard for you, then it is recommended that you review steps four and six in the suffering-paradigm materials on depression-anxiety. These deal with the “stories” that often build around our experience of depression-anxiety and how we allow the gospel to become the larger narrative that re-contextualizes these experiences.

Read Psalm 31:9-15. Notice how honest the psalmist is. He is in distress to the point that his soul and body are exhausted (v. 9). This has been a chronic, long-term struggle for the psalmist (v. 10). Whether it is accurate or only his perception we cannot be sure, but the psalmist perceives that his entire social life is wrecked by this struggle (v. 11-13). Yet he is able to doubt the messages of his fear enough to let a new narrative emerge; one where God is trustworthy and guiding his life (v. 14-15). Balancing of emotional authenticity (listening) and emotional freedom (with doubt) is what we’ve sought to accomplish with this technique for battling anxiety-depression.

2. **But Don’t Over Analyze:** Don’t get caught trying to “crack the code” in every instance of or journal entry about depression-anxiety. Too often when we engage counseling literature we treat our struggles as if they are riddles to be solved instead of experiences to be lived through and learned from. So, if as you listen to your emotions you do not get a profound insight, that is okay.

In most instances of listening to your emotions, you will simply gain enough distance from them to discern what is good, doubt what is destructive, and choose what is wise. If that much happens, then your experience with that episode of depression-anxiety was an incredible success. God rejoices over you, and you’re becoming more of the person he designed you to be.

If every reflection resulted in an epiphany, you would be exhausted. If we have too many game-changer moments in our life, then we never get to play that “game of life” well. Be content to live wisely in response to each episode of depression-anxiety and trust that God will reveal any big-picture changes that need to occur when you are ready to enact them.

Read Ephesians 5:15-17. Notice how non-impressive the “will of the Lord” is in this passage. Examine your day-to-day life (v. 15). Make the best use of your time (v. 16). Don’t do foolish stuff (v. 17). There are times when God clearly does not want us to over think what it means to please him. A large part of living in the will of God is trusting God to reveal the things we need to know/change/do when we are ready for them.

3. **Practice the Opposite:** Emotions have reflexes that contribute to their survival. Impatience fixates on the awaited event in a way that makes patience harder. Jealousy becomes controlling in a way that makes the freedom of the other person arouse more suspicion. Anger recalls every past offense and, thereby, fuels its own fire.

So ask yourself these questions, “What are my depressive-anxious reflexes? What are things that I naturally do when I feel anxious-depressed that make these emotions a more permanent part of my mood?”

Now ask yourself these questions, “What are the opposite reactions to the things I just wrote? How could I make my life less hospitable for depression-anxiety once I begin to experience these emotions?”

If you view this as a mere behavioral intervention, it will seem juvenile; as if you are trying to psych yourself out with reverse psychology. Instead, realize that emotions have behavioral residue as much as they have chemical compositions. If we are going to alleviate the presence of an undesired emotion, we need to combat it at every level – personal beliefs, brain chemistry, and behavioral residue.

Read Ephesians 4:20-32. Notice the three-part change pattern in this passage: put-off (v. 22), put-on (v. 24), and thinking change (v. 23). The following verses apply this pattern to lying (v. 25), anger (v. 26-27), stealing (v. 28), degrading speech (v. 29-30), and bitterness (v. 31-32). Review your notes above and summarize what you learned using these three questions.

- 1) What depression-anxious reactions do I need to “put off”?
- 2) What are the corresponding “put on’s” that would be necessary to replace them?
- 3) What key beliefs or aspects of personal identity would need to change to solidify these changes?

4. **Don’t Be a Perfectionist:** Perfectionism may be the best recipe for getting stuck in a perpetual cycle of depression-anxiety. Pressure to be perfect stirs anxiety. Looming, inevitable failure saps all hope and leads to depression. Unless you give up and settle for being “average” then the only option is to get up and repeat the cycle again.

One implication of this is that you will not combat depression-anxiety perfectly and you need to be okay with that. There will be skills you learn that you forget to use or use clumsily. There will be truths you learn and only see their relevance in hindsight. These are pivotal moments in the change process, because you will either get frustrated with yourself and be stalled by shame or embrace God’s grace for these moments and continue to grow.

In order to jettison a perfectionistic mindset consider the following approaches.

- *Set Attainable Goals* – Do your goals leave any room for you to exceed your expectations? If not, then your goal-setting approach only leaves you the options of “doing the expected” or “failure.” When maximum effort and full potential are needed for mere contentment, then you’re not living an emotionally sustainable life.
- *Set Reasonable Time Limits* – Sometimes it is not what we expect of ourselves, but how quickly we expect it that emotionally damns ourselves. Impatience rather than grandiosity becomes the unhealthy fuel of our perfectionism. How much margin do you allot for in your learning curve when you set goals?
- *Accept Doing “Good Enough”* – Is “okay” a four-letter-word in your vocabulary? If everything you do has to be excellent, there will not be enough time or energy for things like family, friendship, or a personal relationship with God. You need a long list of things for which you can be content doing “good enough.”
- *Stop Black-and-White Thinking* – If, in your mind, the equivalent of “not excellent” is “awful,” then you are likely an emotionally self-abusive person. There needs to be more degrees on your performance thermometer than two – incredible and deplorable.
- *Find Joy in the Journey* – A good parent enjoys watching their child grow; the stumbling steps of a toddler, the broken words of an elementary student learning to read, the fear of a first job interview, the clumsiness with which they cling to a newborn are all precious to a good parent. We need to delight in the process of our own growth in the same way a good parent and God the Father delights in ours.
- *Find Worth in God* – Ultimately, perfectionism is about finding our worth in our performance. That is an emotional economy that always goes bankrupt. When we forget that we are loved because of whose we are (God’s) instead of what we do, our entire emotional world goes into upheaval.

Read Genesis 1:10, 12, 18, and 25. Notice how God describes his work of creation – simply “good.” God was not competing with anyone, so he did not feel compelled to use words like “better,” “best,” or “ultimate.” We see in this

the contentment of God. It did not hamper his creative excellence, but it allowed him to enjoy the process of creating. We are called to be like God; which means we learn to be content in our pursuit of godliness (1 Tim. 6:6). We rely on God's grace in the process of change and rest in his grace as that change occurs.

Life Management

Sometimes managing our emotions can become a distraction from managing our lives. If you find that any of the subjects below are contributing to your experience of depression-anxiety, then these areas would need to be addressed in order for other changes you make to have a lasting effect.

1. **Make a Budget:** Debt and financial uncertainty can greatly contribute to the experience of anxiety-depression. It can be important to remember, "All we spend is our life." Our economy is based upon the trade of hours for dollars and dollars for stuff. When we overspend our life, we cannot expect our emotions to be immune to this imbalance.

If you need help creating and using a budget, visit www.bradhambrick.com/gcmfinances. While this resource is part of a marriage curriculum, the forms and concepts can be used by singles and couples alike.

2. **Have Realistic Time Expectations:** If you think you "should" do more than is feasible in a 168 hour week, you are setting yourself up for a nasty cycle of anxiety-depression. For many people this a core part of their emotional struggle. They are unwilling to adjust their expectations to the reality of a 24 hour day, 168 hour week, and 672 hour month.

If you need help adjusting your time expectations, visit www.bradhambrick.com/burnout. This page provides the teaching and tools to walk you through the process of gaining realistic time expectations.

3. **Simplify:** How many things do you feel like you have to keep up with in order for life to go well and be safe? The more answers you have to this question the greater your struggle with anxiety-depression will be. This doesn't mean secondary and tertiary commitments are bad. It does mean you should carry them with the emotional weight of primary commitments.

An emotionally healthy life is marked by margin. If you perpetually feel rushed, then chances are your activity level is a primary contributor to your experience of depression-anxiety. As you create a budget for your time and money (previous two points), it will force you to simplify your life. You will only use these documents in a healthy way if you view this simplifying as freedom instead of punishment.

"I have often said that the sole cause of man's unhappiness is that he does not know how to stay quietly in his room." Blaise the Pascal in *Penses* 136

4. **Externally, Address Problems:** Is there a persistent emotional irritant in your life that you could address? If there is, do so. Do you need help with a project you don't understand? Ask. Are you carrying bitterness towards someone? Forgive. Are you hiding a secret that is stressful? Disclose. It is unrealistic to expect an alleviation of depression-anxiety if you guard these kinds of emotional irritants.

It may seem simplistic to offer these one-word solutions. That is not my intent. These one-word action steps may require counseling or guidance. If that is the case, then seek that counseling and guidance. Even if you do not feel capable of taking the necessary step, start the process of gaining the strength/skill necessary to do so.

5. **Internally, Learn from Mistakes:** In chapters four and five we learned what it means to repent of and confess sin. This is different. Here it is being recommended that you learn from your mistakes. If we don't have a category for "non-moral short-comings" then the weight of every non-perfectly executed action becomes a burden that fuels an experience of condemnation.

Social faux-pas, ineffective scheduling plans, moments of forgetfulness, acts of clumsiness, and similar mistakes are not moral. God is not displeased. God won't forgive us because he's not upset. Allow yourself the emotional freedom to learn from these moments without the pressure to get them right next time "or else." But do learn from them so that they do not create a cumulative disruption that creates an emotionally unhealthy life.

Pursuit of Joy Plan

Battling depression-anxiety can make you a very negative person towards yourself. Your focus can easily become exclusively upon what you shouldn't be feeling. If this happens, your ability to sustain whatever change you are able to generate will be significantly compromised. That is why we take the time to encourage you to develop a “pursuit of joy” plan as part of your strategy for battling depression-anxiety.

1. **Engage Your Interests:** What do you enjoy? Take the time to make a long list. Include things you would like to try but are not sure you would enjoy. As you write, initially resist a sense of guilt about being “selfish.” As long as the things you write are not immoral, God wants you to engage in these things. These interests are part of His design of you.

Based on the list you created, begin to ask yourself these questions:

- Which of these could fit best in the rhythm of my day, week, or month?
- Which of these are special occasion pleasures that I should plan for?
- What changes would I need to make in order to create the space for these activities?
- How could I use these activities to develop relationships that would be rewarding and help ensure my prolonged engagement in these activities?

Try not to think of these things as “treats” for “being good.” Instead realize that they are part of a healthy, balanced life. If you think of them as a “treat” they will get cut when the next surge of life demands come.

2. **Distract Yourself:** Often distraction carries a negative connotation. Veg-ing out in front of the television for hours instead of studying or paying bills is bad. But we should recognize that often depression-anxiety regains its foothold during very mundane moments – when we're driving the car, mowing the yard, doing a mindless task, or settling down to go to sleep.

These moments are not conducive to many of the strategies we've listed. In these moments having an arsenal of enjoyable distractions is important – enjoyable music, computer game, movie, etc... It is not a form of escape to use these as distraction outlets during times when your hands are occupied but your mind is free to roam or when your body is tired but your mind has the energy to spin.

3. **Savor Every Moment:** Life will never be a series of epic moments. In order to enjoy life, we must learn to savor the ordinary. This is the essence of contentment, the secret Paul discovered to thriving in any circumstance (Phil. 4:11-12).

The opposite of depression-anxiety will not be “highs” that are the equal-opposite of the “lows” of fear and despair. Instead, the alternative to depression anxiety will be the ability to enjoy the “mids” of day-to-day, normal life. While this may not be as exciting as many people would like, it provides a much more realistic goal.

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:16-19. Consider this point of application for what it means to “give thanks in all circumstances” (v. 18); the spiritual discipline of savoring life. Living out this discipline is a primary way we “do not quench the Spirit” (v. 19). When we see and acknowledge the goodness God put in each moment we are emboldening the Spirit in our lives. How do we do this? Consider the following practices:

- Grow the habit of asking “What is good?” about each situation and relationship you are in? If this is hard for you, then pray God would give you “eyes to see” what is good.
- Resist the tendency to grow bored with God's blessings. We do not want to be God's spoiled child who says we have nothing to do while surrounded by toys.
- Begin to grow your in ability to take pleasure in small things. If depression-anxiety is savoring (mentally rehearsing bad things), then exercise the same cognitive-emotional muscle in how you savor good things.
- Allow the memory of good things to be an extension of their goodness. We do this with holidays, weddings, and other major events. Carry the same discipline into less intense pleasures.

Strategic Spiritual Disciplines

We do not engage spiritual disciplines primarily for therapeutic reasons; we engage them to know and enjoy God. However, when engaged well, these disciplines do have therapeutic benefit. There are even particular benefits that can be generally ascribed to particular disciplines. We will explore a few of these.

“We believe that a clearly articulated Christian worldview and a congruent incredible Christian lifestyle constitute a form of primary prevention (p. 136).” Mark Yarhouse, Richard Butman, and Barrett McRay in *Modern Psychopathologies: A Comprehensive Christian Appraisal*

1. **Bible Study:** How much of the struggle with depression-anxiety is the “bad content” in our thinking? The most effective counseling approach for depression-anxiety is cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) which involves challenging the beliefs and corresponding behaviors that under-gird these emotions. Bible study followed by practical application is an excellent discipline to establish this pattern on a daily basis.

For instruction on how to institute this consider the following chapters from books that provide guidance the spiritual discipline of Bible study.

- Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, chapter five
- Donald Whitney, *Spiritual Discipline for the Christian Life*, chapters two and three
- John Ortberg, *The Life You’ve Always Wanted*, chapter ten

2. **Prayer and Worship:** How much of the struggle with depression anxiety is our thinking caving in on itself? Our thinking needs an outlet and purpose in order to be healthy. Prayer and worship provide direction for our thought life. Prayer allows even our inward thought to “connect” with someone who cares and understands. Worship provides a focal point for our thoughts that is grander than our situation is bad.

For instruction on how to institute this consider the following chapters from books that provide guidance the spiritual discipline of prayer and worship.

- Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, chapters three and eleven
- Donald Whitney, *Spiritual Discipline for the Christian Life*, chapters four and five
- John Ortberg, *The Life You’ve Always Wanted*, chapter four

3. **Silence and Meditation:** How much of the struggle with depression anxiety is our inability to reign in our thoughts? Silence and meditation are disciplines that tame the wild horse that is our thought life. They are practices advocated by Christians for centuries because of their benefits for the life and character of believers.

For instruction on how to institute this consider the following chapters from books that provide guidance the spiritual discipline of silence and meditation.

- Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, chapters two and seven
- Donald Whitney, *Spiritual Discipline for the Christian Life*, chapter ten
- John Ortberg, *The Life You’ve Always Wanted*, chapter five

4. **Journaling:** How much of the struggle with depression anxiety is the seeming pointless disconnection of day-to-day life? Life can easily begin to feel like a bad novel where one page has little to do with the page before it. Events keep happening but they don’t seem to be contributing to anything. This is what led Socrates to say, “The unexamined life is not worth living.” Depression-anxiety responds, “Amen!”

For instruction on how to institute this consider the following chapters from books that provide guidance the spiritual discipline of journaling.

- Donald Whitney, *Spiritual Discipline for the Christian Life*, chapter eleven
- Using a Personal Journal for Spiritual Growth at www.bradhambrick.com/journal

Conclusion

Remember this chapter was meant to be a buffet; there was more offered than you’ll be able to implement. That is intentional and designed so that you can select those strategies that are the best fit for you. Start by ranking the six areas discussed in terms of where your weaknesses are contributing most to your ongoing struggle with anxiety-depression.

Rank: 1 – Most Change Needed 6 – Least Change Needed	Focal Area	Weakness: What needs to change in this area?	Impact of Weakness: How does this weakness contribute to struggle?
	Immediate Negative Emotion Response Plan		
	Stewarding Your Body		
	Extended Negative Emotion Response Plan		
	Life Management		
	Pursuit of Joy Plan		
	Strategic Spiritual Disciplines		

Based upon what you wrote above, pick the three strategies from this chapter you want to implement first. Allow them to become a comfortable part of your lifestyle before you consider implementing other strategies. If you have trouble identifying what you want to begin with, ask the counselor, pastor, or friend who is going through this study with you.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Accountability Focus (RESTRUCTURE LIFE):

With each step, we will provide questions you should invite another person to encourage you and hold you accountable with to make important changes.

- What type of strategies do you most need to implement (which of the six areas examined)?
- What specific strategies are you committing to implement first?
- How can I best encourage you in the process of implementing these changes?

Chapter 7

“Actively Doubting My Anxiety-Depression”

IMPLEMENT the new structure pervasively with humility and flexibility.

“Plans are easier than life. Plans exist outside my sinful heart and broken world. Trying to live out my plan has taught me more about my self, my sin, and my Savior. As I have had victory, the old expressions of fear-despair have taken new forms. I have had to remember that my plans are merely how I intend to rely on God and not, themselves, my deliverer.

Here are the unexpected challenges I faced [list], how I failed [list], where I succeeded [list], what I learned [list], and how God has been faithful [list]. I now see that [list] is really the most important elements of my plan.”

Memorize: Exodus 14:13-14 (ESV), “And Moses said to the people, ‘Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will work for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again. The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be silent.’” As you memorize this passage reflect upon these key points:

- “Fear not” – This is both a command to follow and an invitation to receive; obey and find refuge in this passage.
- “Stand firm” – The opposite of fear is not always peace, but it is always trust that allows you stand firm.
- “Never see again” – This promise was specific to Israel’s situation and may not be transferable to your own.
- “The Lord will fight” – The action behind God’s promise to Israel is true for the fear of every believer.
- “Only to be silent” – God may call for varying degrees of our participation in how he addresses our depression-anxiety. In this case, God called for very little action from Israel; only the faith to watch was about to unfold.

Teaching Notes

“The task at hand is to practice turning to the Lord when you are afraid—so it becomes natural and instinctive to turn to him (p. 10)... Are you beginning to think that your fears are actually opportunities to know God better, to trust him, and to witness how he will give you grace when you need it (p. 72)?” Ed Welch in *When I Am Afraid*

“Patience is the evidence of an inner strength. Inpatient people are weak, and therefore dependent upon external supports—like schedules that go just right in circumstances that support their fragile hearts (p. 173).” John Piper in *Future Grace*

“Christians who worry believe that God can redeem them, break the shackles of Satan, taken from hell to heaven, put them into his kingdom, and give them eternal life, but just don’t think he can get them through the next couple of days (p. 24).” John MacArthur, Jr. in *Anxiety Attacked*

“Individuals who continued their exercise regimen after recovering from depression were far less likely to relapse than those who take an antidepressant medication alone (p.67).” Leslie Vernick in *Lord, I Just Want to Be Happy*

“It was then I learned that gratitude is the best feeling I would ever have, the ultimate joy of living. It was better than sex, better than winning a lottery, better than watching your daughter graduate from college, better and deeper than any other feeling; it is perhaps, the genesis of all other really good feelings in the human repertoire. I am sure that nothing in life can ever match the feeling of being held by the gracious energy percolating from the abyss where beats the loving heart of God (p. 215).” Lewis Smedes as quoted by Leslie Vernick in *Lord, I Just Want to Be Happy*

“Some people have said that faith is like a step into the unknown, as in, ‘You just have to have faith.’ But there is nothing unknown about it. Faith is all about choosing sides (p. 87).” Ed Welch in *What Do You Think of Me? Why Do I Care?*

Embedded Study

As you reach this chapter the momentum of change has probably already fluctuated several times. Getting started was hard. It felt like an uphill battle. Fear and despair didn't want to let go of you and you didn't want to admit it had a hold on you. Doubting your emotions can feel like betraying a friend; breakups are never easy even when they're good.

But honesty with self, others, and God has a great way of building momentum. You began to let go of the weights of sin that clung to you so you could run free (Heb. 12:1). This second phase is almost always exciting. People sometimes feel unsettled by the sense of freedom that comes with emotional liberty.

In the third phase, the one we're starting now, life restructuring may begin to feel more like work again. “Implementation” is not an exciting word or process. Lasting change happens in incremental units and mundane moments. Change begins to impact moments that feel “less relevant” to your battle with depression-anxiety. The relief you've gained tempts you think you can risk a few of your previous bad emotional habits.

In this chapter you will evaluate the effectiveness and needed modifications to your life restructuring plan made in chapter six. This step will require the passage of time. Implementing (chapter seven) takes longer than creating a plan (chapter six). For this reason, if you are in a group program, it is recommended that you give at least two months to this step. You will need to see how your plan responds to the changes of settings, relationships, and emotions that happen more over months than days.

As this time passes, there are two areas of assessment that you will be performing from this chapter. First, you will be learning how to measure lasting progress. What is the difference between “I'm having a good day” and “My life is beginning to conform to God's design”? Second, you will be looking at key areas of your life to make sure that you have not overlooked something that was not immediately relevant during the emotional crisis that precipitated your seeking help.

How to Measure Lasting Progress?

Measuring progress is tricky for many reasons. First, measuring progress is an attempt to measure something very fluid and dynamic. There is a rise and fall, acceleration and deceleration in progress that makes it hard to get a concrete reading. Second, measuring progress has a tendency to measure performance over dependence. This tendency can easily begin to undermine the God-reliance stressed throughout this material. Finally, measuring progress can foster shame when there is some type of regression. How regression is handled is pivotal to establishing lasting change.

C.S. Lewis gave a very instructive metaphor for how to deal with shame. Lewis compared shame to hot coffee. If we spill hot coffee on our skin we are burned, scalded, and feel disgusting. However, if we drink coffee we are warmed, nourished, and energized. When we avoid shame or wallow in shame, it becomes like spilled coffee. When we handle the stigma that may exist over depression-anxiety in the ways that are outlined in Scripture, then even our weaknesses draw us closer to Christ, remind us of the necessity of the cross, and give us testimony to share.

David Powlison gives seven indicators that progress is being made with sin (bold text only). These are discussed to give you a more robust understanding of progress than merely counting the number of good emotional days. As you read these consider how each point helps you see and/or maintain progress even when you experience bouts of depression-anxiety.

1. **Decrease in Frequency of Sin:** Progress does mean that we should sin less; trust and rest in God more. As you implement these materials in context of loving community and wise medical advisement, there should be noticeable and quantifiable decreases in the frequency of your depressive-anxious experiences. A holistic plan to combat depression-anxiety lived in the encouragement-accountability of friends disempowers the passivity and sense of futility that sustains chronic depression-anxiety.
2. **Repenting More Quickly:** Progress means that when sin leads us to anxiety-depression we will respond to those emotions differently. Quick repentance is the key to stopping “emotional paralysis.” No longer will you give into the mindset, “If I'm already down, I might as well stay down because there's nothing I can do about it.” You should be conversationally comfortable going to God in repentance (review step four).

3. **A Change in Battleground:** Progress should mean that you see an advance in your battle against sin; from behaviors and belief to its core fortress—your heart commitments. These changes should excite you. This realization is what allowed Paul to say "I am the chief of sinners" (1 Tim. 1:15) without shame. He was excited to take his battle with sin to its core. While each new battleground may require different strategies and durations of time to win, there should be a joy as you see God's kingdom penetrating new territory in your soul.
4. **Having a Greater Sense of Need for Christ's Mercy and Grace:** Progress that does not persistently realize its reliance upon Christ, degenerates into pride and becomes a stronghold for the enemy. The enemy may use this stronghold as the basis for generating new expectations or failures that create a recurrence of depression-anxiety. The point is not to try to predict where every new emotional challenge will come from, but to remain humble and reliant upon God regarding whatever emotional challenge may arise.
5. **Increase accountability and honesty:** Progress means that you do not need a "reason" to be honest and things do not have to be "that bad" in order for you to have accountability. In many ways, this variable is one of the primary, practical expressions of the humility discussed above. Humble people refuse to fight sin alone and refuse to trust their own hearts apart from the community of caring, Christian friends (Heb. 3:12-14).
6. **Not Responding to Difficulty by Indulging in Sin:** Difficulty is the time when progress is most clear. When we forget this, we become discouraged by difficulty and this discouragement adds to our temptation. Recognize that when difficulty comes (i.e., conflict, stress, setbacks, etc...) this will be a time when your progress will be most evident. Realizing this should help you maintain the will to persevere during these challenges.
7. **Learning to Love and Consider the Interest of Real People:** This is the epitome of progress because it is the fulfillment of the whole law of God (Gal. 6:2). The opposite of depression-anxiety is not mere absence of unpleasant emotions. The opposite of depression-anxiety is the emotional freedom to form real, caring relationships with other real, in-process people. You come to people, not primarily seeking relief from your struggles, but the opportunity for authentic relationship because you know that is what is healthiest for both of you.

There is another way we can think about measuring our progress with depression-anxiety. We can look at markers of reliance upon God in the moment of struggle or we can consider a multi-dimensional way of measuring the decreasing size of our emotional struggle. We want to do both; we want to increase our reliance upon God in the midst of the experience (criteria above) and we want to decrease the size of our emotional disruption in as many ways as possible (criteria below).

As you face the ebb-and-flow of your emotions, we want you to look for three markers of progress: intensity, duration, and frequency. Even when your emotions are unpleasant, look for these markers as evidences of God's grace. To help you make sense of what growth looks like practically, imagine a sound wave (see the illustration below). A sound wave can be measured three ways:

- Intensity (height: A to B),
- Duration (width: Y to Z), and
- Frequency (peak to peak: 1 to 2).

Our experience of depression-anxiety can be measured in the same three categories. This now gives you three ways that you can begin to measure progress with your emotional struggle. Is your anxiety less intense? Does your depression last for briefer periods of time? Are your emotional disruptions less frequent? Your depression-anxiety journals should provide a fairly objective basis of comparison.



Illustration: Depression-Anxiety and Sound Wave Comparison

To provide some encouragement consider the following “life disruption score” (LDS). LDS is an arbitrary statistic, but it highlights a valid point. Let’s assume that the intensity, duration, and frequency your depression-anxiety were maxed out on a 1 to 10 scale. That would create a LDS score of 1,000.

$$10 \text{ (intensity)} \times 10 \text{ (duration)} \times 10 \text{ (frequency)} = 1,000$$

Now let’s assume that you are able to decrease the impact of each variable only by two increments. How much do you think that would improve your LDS score?

$$8 \times 8 \times 8 = \underline{\hspace{2cm}} \text{ (yes, you have to do the math)}$$

Are you surprised at what a small amount of progress in each area can do? It is not just a math trick. It is the grace of God. If our sanctification (spiritual, relational, and emotional maturity) required a level of effort that matched the impact of our sin, that would be self-atonement. What it takes is dying to self and wisely living for God’s glory through blessing others. When that starts, the momentum of all Heaven is at our back. Each step of faith is caught up in the current of God’s grace.

You might ask, “What is the key variable that makes this work?” The answer is hope. When we begin to see that we can, by God’s grace, have influence over our emotions we gain hope. We feel less powerless. Depression-anxiety thrives in an environment of perceived-futility. Once we gain hope, much of the bondage of depression-anxiety is broken.

Looking for Progress

Now that you have a more complete picture of what progress is, you need to do a thorough examination of your life to determine how well this progress is being actualized in various parts of your life. In the material below you will examine the key relationships (who?), times (when?), locations (where?), and activities (what?) in which progress should be becoming increasingly evident.

It is important that as you assess these areas that you are as honest about them as you have been with everything else in this study. It would be easy to allow change-fatigue to tempt you to become less authentic with others or honest with yourself. However, if you treat non-crisis sin differently than you treat crisis sin, then it will become a crisis situation again.

Inspection Area One: Who?

Spouse: If you are married and your marriage is a frequent source of depression-anxiety, then the first assessment you need to make is whether these emotions emerge from a lack of safety or security.

- Safety concerns would be related to forms of physical, verbal, or sexual abuse.
- Security concerns would be related to the stability or quality of the marriage relationship.

If you have safety concerns, these should be discussed with a pastor or counselor who can help you assess the severity of these concerns and any immediate changes in living arrangements the situation may require. A couple of resources to help you think through this kind of situation would be:

- *The Emotionally Destructive Marriage* by Leslie Vernick
- The Chronically Self-Centered Spouse (blog series) at bradhambrick.com/selfcenteredspouse

If you have security concerns, then seeking to engage with quality marriage enrichment material in the context of trusted married friends would be the ideal next step. A series of “Creating a Gospel-Centered Marriage” enrichment seminars are available in the areas of foundations, communication, finances, decision making, and intimacy at bradhambrick.com/gcm.

Individual Person: If there are particular people who trigger heightened experiences of depression-anxiety, then a similar safety-security assessment is the first step. Do these individuals pose a threat to you or are you merely insecure, for whatever reason, in their presence?

If you have safety concerns, it is advised that you seek guidance from a supervisor, administrator, teacher, or other suitable authority figure over the relationship. If the relationship does not have a suitable overseer, then seeking the guidance of a pastor or counselor is advised. The book *The Emotionally Destructive Relationship* is also recommended.

If you have security concerns, then learning to vocalize those concerns, learning social skills to overcome points of intimidation, or becoming less dependent upon the approval of this individual are likely advisable. The resources below address various aspects of these concerns.

- *When People Are Big and God Is Small* by Ed Welch is good for relationships with a codependent dynamic.
- *The Peacemaker* by Ken Sande is good for those who are intimidated by conflict.
- *Relationships: A Mess Worth Making* by Paul Tripp and Tim Lane outlines normal relational expectations.
- *Picture Perfect* by Amy Baker describes how to handle perfectionistic expectations of yourself.

Group: If your experience of depression-anxiety is attached to particular groups of people (i.e., those perceived to have more status than you, those whose appearance you rank higher, those who are different from you in some way you deem significant, etc...), then you need to examine the motivation and history for that reaction.

Generally these depressive-anxious reactions to a group can be attributed to (a) an idolatrous over-valuing of certain “desired” attributes and social roles, (b) aspects of an abusive personal history that changed your instinctual response to those who remind you of the abusive experience, or (c) a prejudicial response of unrest towards a particular group of people.

If your depressive-anxious response is rooted in a reaction to abuse, then this is suffering and it is recommended that you utilize a resource such as counseling or one of the books listed below to help you overcome these responses.

- *On the Threshold of Hope* by Diane Langberg
- *Mending the Soul* by Steven R. Tracy
- *Rid of My Disgrace* by Justin and Lindsey Holcomb
- *Is It My Fault?* by Justin and Lindsey Holcomb

If your depression-anxious response to a group of people is rooted in idolatry or prejudice, then it is recommended that you take to heart the truths found in the passage below.

Read Galatians 3:28-29. Strong emotional reactions based upon group identification reveal that we are valuing as “most essential” things that are not “most important” about a person. Our reaction reveals our preferences have become a strong measuring system. We sin when we deem people (individuals or groups) as safe-unsafe or good-bad without knowledge of whether our assessment is true. We must allow the gospel, rather than our fears, to be the lens through which we see people.

Role: Sometimes our emotional reactions have less to do with a particular person than it does with the dynamic of the relationship or the responsibilities we bear in a particular position. If a particular role is preventing you from experiencing greater freedom from depression anxiety, then it is important to discern whether it is because of (a) inadequate training or preparation to fulfill that role, or (b) the weight-significance that you place upon that role.

If a lack of training or preparation for a particular role is the impetus for ongoing depression-anxiety, then ask yourself the questions, “What training do I need?” and “How could I begin to pursue it?” As we’ve said many times, depression-anxiety often tempts us to passivity in the status-quo. Don’t settle for that. Use the emotional relief you’ve found at this point in the study to pursue the training that would preclude a recurrence of depression-anxiety.

If you are over-valuing a particular role in a way that makes your life imbalanced, then you will have to wrestle with your priorities and values. Imbalanced priorities will crash even the best of systems; meaning, however excellent your step six plan for change may be, it will migrate back towards what you previously knew unless your values change. In this scenario, the type of insights that you gained in step three on motives will be important focal points for your accountability relationships.

Read Ephesians and fill in the chart below. The message of Ephesians can be summarized as “Don’t be who you were.” As you read Ephesians, pay special attention to columns one and three with old identity and new identity contrasts. You may find other old identity versus new identity contrasts. Add those to your chart. After making that list, go back and capture the experience of each identity – particularly as you have experienced in your spiritual maturation. An example is given for “far off” versus “a minister of God’s grace” to help you get started.

Who I Was Before Christ	My Experience	Who I Am In Christ	My Experience
Dead (2:1-10)		Alive	
Children of Disobedience (2:2; 5:1)		Adopted Children	
Far Off (2:11-22)	Feared people; felt rejected	Brought Near	Secure in Christ, willing to be vulnerable
The Least (3:7-13)		A Minister of God's Grace	
Morally Confused (4:14-19)		Lovingly Confident	
Old Man (4:20-24)		New man	
Crude (4:29-32)		Thankful	
Idolaters (5:3-6)		Set Apart	
Darkness (5:7-14)		Light	
Fools (5:15-17)		Wise	
Drunkard (5:18-21)		Filled with the Spirit	

Inspection Area Two: When?

Time of Day/Week/Month: Try to pay attention to whether depression-anxiety emerges at predictable times in the rhythms of your life. Are there regular points in your day, week, or month when the struggle with depression-anxiety is stronger? If the answer is yes, then ask yourself, “What type of rhythm best accounts for this – sleep cycle, work load, social interaction, meal times, financial pay cycles, hormonal cycles, etc...?”

If your depression-anxiety is linked to biological or time-related rhythms, then it is likely rooted more in suffering than in sin. It would be wise to consult with a physician who could help identify how to regulate the body functions that account for these changes in mood.

If your depression-anxiety is linked to behavioral or social rhythms, then, at the very least, you need to examine your life management systems. How well do you manage time and money? How willing are you to say “no” to over-commitments? How assertive are you in unhealthy relationships? If you find your mismanagement is rooted in bad priorities, which is often the case, then repent and commit to change. If the mismanagement is rooted in ignorance commit to learn and change.

Some resources that might be of benefit in this area are listed below. However,

- Time management – bradhambrick.com/burnout
- Financial management – bradhambrick.com/gcmfinances
- Recommendations on the relational aspects are provided in the sections above

Season: Similar to day-week-month rhythms can be seasonal or annual rhythms. Depression-anxiety can be related to changes in daylight and temperature or significant events (i.e., holidays, anniversaries, etc...). If your depression-anxiety is related to significant events, it may be tied to a grief reaction or mourning process. If you have a significant loss that lacks closure, then the resource at bradhambrick.com/griefseminar is recommended.

If your depression-anxiety is related to daylight and temperature changes, then you likely began this study when it was winter and have persevered into the Spring and Summer. The relief that you presently feel may be the result of both the new beliefs-practices you’ve gained from this study and the change in seasons. As you prepare for the winter months again, it would be wise to consider going to the tanning bed, taking a vitamin D supplement, and increasing your outdoor activity as much as possible; in consultation with your primary care physician.

Energy Level: Fatigue has a clear and direct impact on depression-anxiety. It would be surprising, to the point of doubting your honesty, if you said your energy level did not impact your struggle with emotional regulation. Here are several questions you need to use to assess how well you are stewarding your body in order to protect against fatigue becoming a contributing factor towards the recurrence of significant depression-anxiety.

- Are you managing your life so that you have time and the mental freedom to get adequate sleep?
- Are you eating a healthy diet so that your body has the nutrition it needs to be chemically balanced?
- Are you getting cardiovascular exercise to help your body eliminate the chemical by-products of stress?
- Are you engaging with activities you enjoy so that your morale for life remains relatively high?
- Are you using caffeine or other stimulants to offset unhealthy lifestyle habits in an unhealthy way?
- Can you thrive for the next decade if you live like you have for the last week? Month?

Before / After: The before/after might be an event (i.e., presentation, visit to family, etc...) or interaction (i.e., conflict, interview, etc...) that are stressful or a “let down” compared to your expectations for that event. Learning to manage anticipation, disappointment, and achievement are important parts of learning to manage the emotions of anxiety-depression in a healthy way.

Anticipation – looking forward to a future event marked by uncertainty – can easily be mistaken as a synonym of anxiety. *Disappointment* – looking back at a past event that fell short of one’s preferences – can easily be mistaken for depression. But if we play this emotional matching game, then we begin to take normal-healthy responses and label them unhealthy or bad reactions.

Achievement may be a less clear trigger. But for some people, especially perfectionists, each achievement becomes their new standard; today’s “great” becomes tomorrow’s “good.” Initially this is motivating and produces growth, but if taken as a life principle it drives an individual to the point that they can only experience failure. At some point we must be content with our capacity or our rebellion against our finitude leaves us with depression-anxiety as our only emotional option.

Life Transitions: Major life transitions can also be times of emotional disorientation. Leaving for college, empty nest, becoming a parent / grandparent, mid-life crisis, retirement, and similar transitions impact us in at least two ways: (1) they cause us to question our identity, and (2) they make it hard for us to know how we “should” feel.”

As you examine how prepared you are to sustain the progress you've made, consider whether there are any major transitions in your near future. If there are, then there are at least three recommended ways to prepare:

1. Expect some level of emotional disorientation. Don't allow surprise to magnify the disruption.
2. Begin now introducing this into conversations with your support network.
3. Get guidance from others who have already faced this type of transition.

Read Ecclesiastes 3:1-8. "For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven (v. 1)." God is not annoyed that you have to consider how these time-factors impact your emotional regulation. God is not tapping his foot wondering when you're going to get back to "important work." God is as, if not more, concerned with your health as he is your productivity. For God your productivity is merely an indicator of your health. Healthy people living out the gospel change the world. So God wants you to take the time to ensure your long-term emotional health so that you can enjoy your ongoing role in advancing his kingdom.

Inspection Area Three: Where?

Home: There are dynamics to home-life that are distinct from other relationships. Home is a place of many associations that come with strong memories. Home is a place of many responsibilities that are not present in other relationships. Home is, ideally, a place of refuge we return to from the stresses of life to reflect on and makes sense of our life's toils.

You can quickly begin to see how home will either be a great protection from or contributor to our experience of depression-anxiety; and why it is hard for home to be a neutral influence on these emotions.

What are the aspects of your home-life (routine and physical layout) that contribute to your depression-anxiety?

What are the aspects of your home-life (routine and physical layout) that help alleviate your depression-anxiety?

How or when can you refine or alter those aspects that contribute to your depression-anxiety?

What contributing aspects of your home-life will you need to learn to be content with?

If your home-life has significant influence on your anxiety depression, ask a friend from your support network or a counselor to review your answers to the questions above. Be sure that that you are assessing what changes are possible and how to best accomplish them well. If depression-anxiety has been your "normal" experience, then it is likely that you may miss or over-under estimate the impact of potential changes.

Work / School: Outside of our homes, work or school is where we most people spend the most time and energy. Our occupation or education is usually how we answer the second standard question of social protocol – "What do you do?" The desire for meaningful vocation is part of how God wired us to fulfill his command to subdue (i.e., bring order to and enrich) the world (Gen. 1:28).

If much of your uncertainty and dissatisfaction with life is tied to your work or selecting the schooling that would help you connect with a satisfying career, then the resources below may help you discern how to connect your vocation with God's general call to advance his kingdom in a way that is more purposeful and satisfying.

- *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God's Work* by Tim Keller
- *The Gospel at Work* by Sebastian Traeger and Greg D. Gilbert
- *The Gospel-Centered Life at Work* by Robert W. Alexander
- *Step by Step* by James Petty (not about vocation, but excellent book on the decision making process)

Activity: Like relationships, particular activities can become too large in our life. The weight that we place on our performance in particular activities can become so significant that it becomes an emotional impairment. How we perform in a sporting event, on an exam, at a task at work, in front of particular people, or during a once-in-a-lifetime moment activity can become the measure of who we are.

This emotional reaction loses touch with reality. You existed before any activity. You exist during any activity. You will exist after any activity; even death. When we live as if one moment will define our life we are living a lie. God is better and more faithful than that.

In financial negotiations people are advised to “never lose their walk-away power.” When they want something so badly they cannot walk away, they will not get a good deal. Similarly, in emotional regulation “never lose your walk-away power.” When a moment becomes so large that you believe your future hangs on it, you will be emotionally crippled.

Read Luke 9:23-25 and Matthew 6:33. God does not want to withhold any good thing from you (Psalm 84:11), but God also does not want you to be owned by any good thing (1 Cor. 10:23). When an activity becomes the source of your depression-anxiety then that is a strong indicator that this line has been crossed. Your joy will be greater in any activity when you are content in God without that activity.

Inspection Area Four: What?

Entertainment: Artificial manipulation of emotions is an increasingly large part of modern entertainment. Less and less of what we consider “entertainment” is relaxation and contentment inducing activity. More and more of entertainment is thrill seeking, tear provoking, fear inducing, awe inspiring, or some other form of other emotional high-low producing activity.

This is not bad, but it also is not neutral. We cannot consistently entertain ourselves with an emotional roller coaster and expect ourselves to remain at an even keel. Some people have a greater ability to withstand these effects than others; just as some people can eat carnival food immediately before getting on a literal roller coaster. But if you find your tolerance for this kind of emotional variation to be low, there are at least three things that can account for this.

The first is stimulation. Movement and stillness have a hard time co-existing, and some people have a harder time transitioning from one to the other than others. Entertainment that “riles us up” creates a sense of unrest you need monitor. You need to learn to gauge how long it takes for you to return to normal afterwards. In the same way you need to know your caffeine-tolerance, you need to know your drama-tolerance.

The second is a “loss of normal.” The more we entertain ourselves to an artificial emotional level, the more those levels become our new normal – the baseline against which we measure other experiences good (above normal) or bad (below normal). If you find it difficult to gauge how good or bad an event is, the more you need to protect yourself from things that disrupt a stable, healthy sense of normal.

The third is triggering a vulnerability. Certain past experiences may make certain forms of entertainment unwise for us. Veterans suffering from PTSD might be affected by war movies to a degree that make them an unwise choice. Those who have suffered domestic violence may find romantic tragedies a genre that is an “emotional net-loss.” If this is the case for you, do not feel ashamed. There is nothing wrong with identifying a vulnerability and avoiding it.

What changes might be wise in your entertainment practices in light of these reflections? _____

Albatross: “Albatross” here refers to occasions that deviate from your “regular” schedule; those occasions for which your instincts and habits may not be well-suited. “Albatross” moments are often “more opportune times” (Luke 4:13) that Satan uses to regain a foothold in our life. Perfectionists often take comfort in routine and, therefore, can find these kinds of moments more emotionally disruptive.

If we perform below our expectations in these irregular parts of life, we are prone to carry a sense of defeat or shame into our “regularly scheduled life.” This is the emotionally dangerous part of “albatross” moments. Life will be unpredictable. We will

often perform less optimally in the parts of life that catch us off guard. But it’s what we emotionally carry from those moments that will determine the impact of those moments have.

Evaluating Your Implementation

The chart on the next page is meant to help you assess how well your life restructuring plan is prepared to adapt to changes in each area of your life.

- The first column corresponds with the major headings and subheadings of this chapter.
- The second column is for you to identify the areas of needed change.
- The next three columns correlate with the “sound wave” criteria for measuring progress.
- The final column is to make notes about changes that need to be made to your life restructuring plan.

You will likely need more space to write than this document provides. This document is meant to help you sketch out general modifications to your life restructuring plan. If beneficial, these brief notes could be expanded in a larger document.

The primary value of this tool is as a conversation outline with your counselor, pastor, or accountability partner. Allow this to be an instrument that teaches you the value of regularly examining life with those who care about you and are committed to pursuing God with you.

A PDF copy of this document can be found at bradhambrick.com/anxiety.

Accountability Focus (IMPLEMENT):

With each step, we will provide questions you should invite another person to encourage you and hold you accountable with to make important changes.

- Am I finding evidence of progress in the seven areas that indicate lasting change is taking place?
- When I struggle with anxiety-depression am I able to see progress in intensity, duration, or frequency?
- As you evaluated the who, what, when, and what aspects of your growth, what did you learn?



DEPRESSION-ANXIETY PLAN IMPLEMENTATION EVALUATION

	Improvement in Intensity	Improvement in Duration	Improvement in Frequency	Needed Changes to Plan
WHO?				
Spouse				
Person 1				
Person 2				
Person 3				
Person 4				
Group 1				
Group 2				
Group 3				
Role 1				
Role 2				
Other				
WHEN?				
Time 1				
Time 2				
Time 3				
Season				
Energy Level				
Energy Level				
Before/After				
Before/After				
Life Transition				
Other				
WHERE?				
Home				
Work				
Activity 1				
Activity 2				
Activity 3				
Other				
Other				
WHAT?				
Entertainment				
Albatross				
Albatross				
Albatross				
Other				

Chapter 8

“Living in the Anti-Climax of Change”

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

“I can see God’s faithfulness over the last [time since beginning this material].

As I have experienced victory, my temptation has changed [describe]

and my ability to focus on God in non-crisis times has been stretched [examples].

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

God has an entirely different agenda for my life [explain] than what I knew.

I am learning to enjoy it and be comfortable in it.”

Memorize: James 1:12-13 (ESV), “Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him. Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am being tempted by God,’ for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one.” As you memorize this passage reflect upon these key points:

- “Blessed” – The place where we experience the fullness of God’s blessing is *with God* more than *outside trials*.
- “Remains steadfast” – We do not have to “overcome” or “conquer.” We are merely called to remain faithful.
- “Under trial” – The temptations that accompany depression-anxiety would be one of these trials.
- “Crown of life” – The “life” promised by the desires that drive our depression-anxiety are offered to us in Christ.
- “Let no one say” – If our depression-anxiety convinces us to turn on God, it separates us from our source of hope.

Teaching Notes

“In the same way our physical workouts need to be varied if we want maximum results, we need to learn additional ways to incorporate gratitude into our lives in order to reap the maximum rewards (p. 217).” Leslie Vernick in *Lord, I Just Want to Be Happy*

“When the Spirit changes you, there usually aren’t bombs going off, and you have as many bad days as you have good. But you notice that you are turning to Jesus more. Then, as Jesus gets bigger in your eyes, the opinions of other people simply become... The opinions of other people and not the piercing gaze of giants (p. 145).” Ed Welch in *What Do You Think of Me? Why Do I Care?*

“Anxiety cannot survive in an environment of praise to God (p. 59).” John MacArthur, Jr. in *Anxiety Attacked*

“Joy is not the opposite of depression. It is deeper than depression. Therefore, you can experience both (p. 140).” Ed Welch in *Depression, A Stubborn Darkness*

“As toddlers, we intuitively know that falling down is part of learning to walk. In the same way, as adults, we need to realize that failure teaches us many lessons we need in order to succeed (p. 148).” Leslie Vernick in *Lord, I Just Want to Be Happy*

Embedded Study

Are you enjoying where you are? Even if you are not “there yet,” can you identify aspects of this part of your journey that make it significantly better than where you’ve been? Unless you can answer “yes” to this question and take delight in that answer, perseverance will be grueling.

Striving without delighting is exhausting.

One of the keys to persevering, especially with a struggle as recurrent as depression-anxiety, is the ability to enjoy an imperfect, in-process life. God does not just delight in you at the culmination of your sanctification. God delights in you right now. He invites you to agree with him; that where he has you in this process is good. This provides the emotional stability and security to engage a struggle like depression-anxiety.

With that as our starting point, let’s ask the question, “What does it look like to continue to follow God from *here*?” Chances are that you’ve put so much energy into getting “here” that it is not entirely clear how to prepare yourself for life after an intensive focus on change. What do you do when your life is not focused on overcoming depression-anxiety? That is the topic of this chapter and the next.

In this chapter we will look at post-temptation temptations—those temptations that uniquely arise when we’re doing “better.” In order to help you finish strong, we will look at three subjects for this stage in your journey.

1. Common Lies and Distractions
2. Victory Changes Temptation
3. Preparing for Transition

Common Lies and Distractions

Strangely “better” is not always easier than “worse.” You likely knew the terrain of your depression-anxiety better than you know the terrain of living in greater emotional freedom. That is the purpose of this section and the next—to prepare you for how emotional challenges frequently mutate as you leave the lifestyle that allowed depression-anxiety to fester.

One of the most effective ways that temptation mutates is by introducing new lies (or revised versions of old lies) and distractions. As you read through this section, you should be preparing to listen to yourself. When you hear yourself thinking these kind of thoughts, you should consider that a warning sign indicating that you should talk with your support network. The discussion after each lie is intended to give you the truth and perspective to counter these disruptive and unhealthy messages.

“I deserve a break. I have been good for a long time now.” When we talk about taking a “break” from our battle with sin it sounds very legitimate, but it leads to a return to sin. If you feel like you need a break, then it is important to make sure you are living a balanced, sustainable life. Review the work you did in chapter six to make sure your expectations of yourself fit within your available life resources of time, money, or energy.

Often one of the causes of depression-anxiety is creating unrealistic expectations about what you should be doing. Too often this same mindset is applied to recovery from depression-anxiety; an individual puts as much excessive effort into “not feeling depressed-anxious” as they did into the goals that drove them to be depressed-anxious. At best, this approach creates short-term relief. Wanting a break from “being good” is an indicator this pattern may exist in your life.

We can set ourselves up for relapse by picturing a “godly” life we cannot maintain. When this happens we feel justified in taking a break from what we perceive to be God’s expectations and move towards sin as our relief. If you assess your expectations and determine they are realistic but hard, then gaining the strength to endure and enjoy this lifestyle is what perseverance is all about (Rom. 5:3-5; James 1:2-4). If this is the case for you, then be sure to ask your support network for prayer and encouragement in this process of growth.

“Now I can get back to focusing on what is important to me.” This distraction buys into the notion that overcoming sin is merely about exchanging an unhealthy form of self-focus to a more functional form of self-focus. Hopefully you have already learned that legitimate pleasures are an essential part of resisting sin of any kind, but have also learned that the “focus” of our lives (i.e., what we worship and gives us meaning) cannot be self-serving.

Sin, even in the form of over-prioritized legitimate pleasures, will never remain self-serving. That is the way sin always likes to introduce itself, as your servant. But once it is allowed to move into your life, it mutates from servant to master. As you finish this study several hours per week may be added to your schedule; the time you're no longer spending reading this notebook and reflecting on the various studies. Be sure to use that time for God-centered, joyful living.

Chapter nine will help you think through that new (or renewed) life-orientation. The life God designed you to live will be incredibly satisfying; it will fit you perfectly because it emerges from how God designed you. So do not be concerned that “not focusing on what was important to you” will result in a drab life. God may give you back the same interests, but with a very different purpose and motivation (Matt. 6:33-34, Luke 9:23-24).

“This is not working, because temptation is still present. No one else has to work this hard.” Temptation only becomes easy (i.e., the sense of active-resisting dissipates) when you stop fighting. But as soon as the weight of temptation is removed by succumbing, the greater weights of guilt and consequence are placed on you.

“No man knows how bad he is till he has tried very hard to be good. A silly idea is current that good people do not know what temptation means. This is an obvious lie. Only those who try to resist temptation know how strong it is. After all, you find out the strength of the German army by fighting against it, not by giving in. You find out the strength of a wind by trying to walk against it, not by lying down... That is why bad people, in one sense, know very little about badness. They have lived a sheltered life by always giving in. We never find out the strength of the evil impulse inside us until we try to fight it: and Christ, because He was the only man who never yielded to temptation, is also the only man who knows to the full what temptation means—the only complete realist (p. 142).” Mere Christianity by C.S. Lewis

Remind yourself that temptation is a sign of spiritual life. Only the dulling of one's conscience can remove the sense of temptation in a sin-saturated culture. In a culture of excess we will perpetually be tempted to want “more” than a given moment, relationship, or salary can provide.

Resisting temptation can make us tired. But you can now view this fatigue as a sign of growth; like the person whose muscles are tired after lifting weights. That is a very different experience than the exhaustion of depression-anxiety. Before you were experiencing the consequences of an imbalanced life (i.e., expectations, activities, values, etc...). What you are experiencing now is the fatigue of maintaining balance in a world that resists balance. The latter can be seen as a mark of God's grace rather than evidence of being at odds with God's design.

“This is not worth it, because [insert desired outcome] is not happening.” It is easy to want to be emotionally free because... How we motivate ourselves is as important as what we accomplish with that motivation. Too often we want to be free from depression-anxiety for selfish reasons.

Removing the distraction of depression-anxiety can add to productivity. Alleviating the self-consciousness of depression-anxiety can free us to engage relationships more authentically. But when these variables become the measure of whether our efforts to emotionally honor God are “worth it” we have again mistaken the cause of our emotions for the cure.

If you are asking, “When will I get what I wanted?” remember what it was like to be a in bondage to depression-anxiety. You now have a better life and the opportunity for your productivity and relational quality to grow; before you had neither (quality of life or opportunity to grow).

Counter this form of distraction with gratitude for the many ways God has proven faithful in your life. Use the increased confidence in God's faithfulness generate a desire that God would produce whatever fruit in your life he deems as most beneficial for you.

“[Blank] situation is now more important than my need to remain at peace.” Rarely would we say this out loud, or even allow ourselves to think it in these words. But this is the lie we believe when we place ourselves back in unwise or compromising situations for “practical” reasons. “Practical” becomes a user-friendly synonym for “more important.”

- “I need to work more hours (get less sleep and spend less time with family) because I really need to get ahead.”
- “I know this person is not emotionally healthy for me, but I miss them and think I'm strong enough to handle it.”
- “I know I was consumed by this recreational activity but I think I can enjoy it without being consumed by it now.”

When you find yourself trying to justify altering or relaxing the changes you made in chapters six and seven, recall this lie as a red flag in your mind. This is why it was important for you to document the changes you made throughout this study. It needs to be clear to you when you are “un-changing” the changes that provided emotional freedom.

Those changes were not made to help you become “strong enough” to walk on enemy turf. Those changes were made because our enemy is stronger than any of us and can only be resisted on the home turf of God’s wisdom. Do not fall prey to thinking that victory won under the protection of God’s wisdom can persist when we fall back into the arena of worldly wisdom commonly called “common sense.”

Victory Changes Temptation

Galatians 6:1-5 speaks to both the temptation of those who are “caught in any transgression” and the temptation of those “who are spiritual.” Anyone who is in the latter category has spent time in the former; there are not saints who have not and do not struggle with sin. As you have progressed through this study, you have begun to move from one category (bondage) to the other (freedom). Below are four new temptations that emerge as we experience victory over sin.

Disappointment from New Heights: Poverty hurts differently when you’ve known wealth. As you live with greater emotional freedom, recurrences of depression-anxiety will likely create a stronger response of guilt than you knew previously.

When depression-anxiety was “normal,” it was less startling. It can be tempting to allow this intensified guilt to fuel a major sense of failure and begin berating yourself. You must recognize (intellectually and emotionally) that God’s grace is sufficient and necessary for falls from any “height” (in quotation because this is our category more than God’s).

A protection from this temptation is to remember that spiritual maturity does not mean independence from God’s grace (see next point), but a greater reliance upon it. **Read I Timothy 1:12-20.** Notice that towards the end of Paul’s ministry he saw himself as more of a sinner than at the beginning (Acts 9). Paul uses this realization as an encouragement to young Timothy (v. 18-20) because he realizes it is the reliance upon grace that is the essence of his message—the gospel (v. 16).

Maturity and Independence: We often are deceived into thinking that spiritual maturity should cause us to be less reliant upon God. “So God can focus on the people who are where we used to be,” we might think. This is a most dangerous mutation in our temptation. It is like a great oak tree thinking its height means it no longer requires the soil. As soon as it detaches from the soil, its height only serve to quicken its fall and increase the damage that is done.

Maturity can only be expressed as greater dependence upon God. Maturity requires this humility like trains require tracks. **Read Galatians 2:18-21.** Notice that Paul warns against rebuilding what was torn down (v. 18). This is exactly what a false view of maturity does. It is from this warning that Paul lays down the principle that maturity is less of me and more of Christ (v. 20). Like a caterpillar matures into a butterfly, we are called to mature into something different from what we started. We started “grounded and crawling” in our independence from God (the essence of sin). We mature into those who embrace dependence upon God as the wings God intended to provide us with freedom. The caterpillar must die so the butterfly can soar.

Pressure of New Opportunities: With growth comes opportunity, and not necessarily because we are seeking it. Managing your life and emotions well almost inevitably brings more “opportunities.” We may get confused about whether a particular opportunity is God “opening a door” or Satan “setting a trap.” But we can be sure with maturity will come opportunities to offer others the hope we have received (II Cor. 1:3-5).

To help yourself see this change as a blessing, begin keeping a list of new responsibilities and opportunities God brings into your life. Give thanks for them regularly. Remember they are tokens of God’s grace; not burdens. Remember that overcoming depression-anxiety is not the end of your journey.

Depression-anxiety was sapping your energy to do things God called you to do, stealing the time in which you would do them, and undermining the confidence that God would bless your efforts. Be discerning about not overloading on these opportunities that you lose the balance you’ve created. But do allow this discernment to make you passive towards changing the world around you (more on this in chapter nine).

Having “Answers” Instead of Questions: As you mature and receive new opportunities, you will likely be looked to for more answers. Your responses to the challenges of life are becoming serene and hopeful, so people will want to know how you would approach their challenges. You begin to get the privilege of joining people at earlier stages in their journey of responding to depression-anxiety in healthier ways.

This is a time when pride can return in more subtle and socially-acceptable ways. We must never think that because a question is brought to us that we are the source of its answer. We must never mistake the glory of the answer for the glory of the vessel (2 Cor. 4:7-18) that has been entrusted with carrying that answer.

Read James 3:1-12. Notice that James is writing to Christians coming out of a struggle (dispersion by religious persecution; see James 1:1) who are now rising to the position of teacher (v. 1). He warns them about the temptation and power of their words in this new role. The message is that the awesome power of influence (bridle and fire images) should keep humble those who are coming into new positions of influence.

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; which are better 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; recognizing 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” (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.

Accountability Focus (PERSEVERE):

With each step, we will provide questions you should invite another person to encourage you and hold you accountable with to make important changes.

- Have I assessed and understand the new forms that temptation may take as I experience victory?
- Does my transition plan seem wise and complete?

Chapter 9

“From Removing Sin’s Remnant to Pursuing God’s Purpose” 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: II Timothy 1:6-7 (ESV), “For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.” As you memorize this passage reflect upon these key points:

- “Remind you” – We can take comfort that the Bible often has to remind its heroes not to fear or despair.
- “Fan into flames” – The main focus of this passage is not against fear, but towards fulfilling God’s purpose.
- “Not of fear” – Our main method of preventing anxiety-depression recurrence is living with purpose.
- “Power and love” – These attributes are meant to serve and bless others.
- “Self-control” – This attribute that prevents our sin and our service from becoming disproportionately unhealthy.

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 your life, not merely the experience of overcoming depression-anxiety. To think otherwise would be to define yourself by your struggle again.

Sin is a parasite that lives off of stolen resources (time, energy, love, etc...) that were intended for other purposes. As we rid ourselves of this vile intruder, those resources upon which sin once indulged become available for God’s design and our true enjoyment. Ultimately, stewardship is the pinnacle where purpose, worship, and joy meet.

“We seldom realize fully that we’re sent to fulfill God-given task. We act as if we were simply dropped down in creation and have to decide to entertain ourselves until we die. But we were sent into the world by God, just as Jesus was. Once we start living our lives with that conviction, we will soon know what we were sent to do (p. 177).” Henri Nouwen as quoted by Leslie Vernick in *Lord, I Just Want to Be Happy*

“Know the kingdom and seek. That is the alternative to worry (p. 38).” Ed Welch in *When I Am Afraid*

Embedded Study

If the law of God can be summarized in a positive command, then we must end this study talking about how to "run to" God rather than merely how to "run from" sin. Life is not about what we avoid, but what pursue. How we run to God's design for our life finds a unique expression in each person's life. For this reason, you will do most of the writing in this chapter. It is your life that is being stewarded for God's glory.

The goal for this chapter is that you would find things that you could give yourself in a way that is more emotionally captivating than your depression-anxiety was. But not just temporal, slightly healthier things that would quickly become the next edition of ruling desires; and not things that you give yourself to in private so that they foster selfishness and excess. Rather, eternally significant things that you give yourself to in a community of faith to maintain endurance, temper desire-excess, and become an example to others.

Read Luke 11:24-26. This is a terrifying warning about removing sin without also replacing it with God's purposes for your life. When we replace sin with a "god-ignoring healthy life" (contradiction acknowledged) we become very proud, and defensive about further change. Our idols (chapter three) become temporarily functional so the warning system of life consequences is muted. Then, when our idols cease to satisfy, and become disruptive again we are less likely to return to God, the Bible, and the gospel because "they didn't really work the first time." We go looking for "deeper and more meaningful" solutions. Indeed, "the last state of that person is worse than the first (v. 26)."

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. We are not now 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). This should give you hope that there are answers to the questions you will be asked in this chapter. 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 these 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 will also be ways you want to serve God that will require you to mature more 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 your answer is "yes" (both responses would lead you back into fear). Rather, identify the obstacle. What is the cost you are unwilling to pay? It may be that this subject becomes a key element in your "plan for future study" (chapter eight).

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 have I neglected that God has 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 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 1 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 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 37:3-8 fulfilled in your life. What are the God-exalting “delights” in your life (v. 4)? What wholesome things can you give yourself to and you are more energized afterwards than before you started?

6. With what talents or abilities has God blessed me? These don’t have to 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 low points for His glory (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 expand your church’s ministries, you are maximizing the impact service can have on those you are seeking to bless.

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 pure in heart, for they shall see God.” Matthew 5:8

Accountability Focus (STEWARD):

With each step, we will provide questions you should invite another person to encourage you and hold you accountable with to make important changes.

- Are there any necessary changes I have omitted that would prevent me from taking this step?
- Is there advice or counsel I should seek before completing this step?

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). 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.

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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).¹

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.

¹ 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 sustainable 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.²

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.

² Additional guidance on this kind of “life hygiene” can be found at 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).

Psalms 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 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:

bradhambrick.com/whatnow
bradhambrick.com/anxiety

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.