# **A Plan and a Path for OCD, Part Two**

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Today’s blog is the second of a three-part series on a biblical approach to OCD. In [Part One](https://www.biblicalcounselingcoalition.org/2022/02/14/a-plan-and-a-path-for-ocd/), we looked at building a **foundation** for change by *educating* about OCD and *captivating* the struggler with the power and merciful love of Jesus Christ. In Part Two, we will **follow** the path to change by helping the OCD struggler to *evaluate* OCD obsessions and compulsions and to *participate* in Christ’s redeeming grace leading to progressive freedom and sanctification. Part Three will then help the counselee **focus** on one area of change at a time and practice a reactive strategy to move toward freedom from OCD.

## **Follow the Path to Change**

We can summarize the path to change in Paul’s words, “faith working through love” (Gal. 5:6). This is both the path and the goal of all gospel ministry—faith in Christ working through love for others—and we will apply it to counseling someone struggling with OCD. In counseling, I often help people develop and practice both *proactive* (things done daily to renew the mind and change the heart) and *reactive* (things done in the moment of struggle or temptation) strategies. This blog will explore proactive strategies for OCD.

***Evaluate***

Simple cognitive-behavioral type questions can help the counselee examine what’s happening externally and internally in the midst of OCD. Here are some questions that could be put on a worksheet for the counselee to think and write about after an OCD episode and then discuss later with the counselor.

1. What was the trigger for the anxious thoughts? What was happening around you?
2. What intrusive thoughts came into your mind? What were you believing?
3. What were you feeling physically and emotionally?
4. How did you respond?
5. What was the result?

Taking time to consider these questions has several benefits. First, it forces the OCD struggler to slow down. OCD can feel like a runaway freight train. Looking carefully at thoughts and feelings can slow racing thoughts and also exercises a measure of self-control which is a necessary part of working through OCD. Second, answering these questions helps make subjectively overwhelming thoughts and feelings more objective and finite. Third, examining these thoughts and feelings can help begin the process of discerning truth from lies. Examples:

* “I saw my lawn-mowing lines were uneven and thought, “I’ve got to do this all over again!”
* “So, I’m really thinking that the health and well-being of myself, my family, and the world depends on washing my hands for the tenth time.”
* “I’ve never realized how my whole body and soul crave total control of my world.”
* “I took a two-hour shower and then felt guilty about wasting so much time.”
* “Lord, I’m beginning to see how little I trust your care for me.”

***Participate***

It’s good to remind ourselves here that what we’re after in helping people who struggle with OCD is the same as in any other counseling issue: progressive sanctification. While God can and does, at times, work quickly and dramatically, He usually works more gradually and progressively in order to build character that lasts and the lifelong habit of “faith working through love” (Gal. 5:6). That’s why “A Plan and Path for OCD” is not “five quick steps to victory.”

In the ***Evaluate*** section, we asked five counselee-referential questions to help the counselee examine their experience of OCD. In the ***Participate*** section, we will ask four God-referential questions to help them begin to apply God’s Word in a proactive, mind-renewing way. For each question, I will provide a Scripture passage and a suggested counselee response. The counselor could use the following Scriptures and suggested responses or assign the questions to the counselee to come up with their own.

**1. What does God see?**

* ***Scripture:*** “During those many days the king of Egypt died, and the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help. Their *cry for rescue from slavery* came up to God. And God *heard* their groaning, and God *remembered* his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob.God *saw* the people of Israel—and God *knew*” (Exod. 2:23-25).
* ***Response:*** Because God sees and hears the groaning of the OCD struggler in his enslaved thoughts and behavior, he can REST in God’s meticulous and affectionate knowledge and care. Learning to rest in God’s care is a significant step.

**2. What does God say?**

* ***Scripture:*** **“**Say therefore to the people of Israel, ‘I am the Lord, and *I will bring you out* from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and *I will deliver you from slavery* to them” (Exod. 6:56a).
* ***Response:*** Because God is committed to rescuing the struggler from the “slavery” of OCD, the counselee can REJOICE in the assurance of His promise. Joy in God’s promises gives strength for godliness (Neh. 8:10; 2 Pet. 1:3-4).

**3. What does God offer?**

* ***Scripture:*** *“For all who rely on works of the law* are under a curse….*Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law* by becoming a curse for us…so that in Christ Jesus the *blessing of Abraham* might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the *promised Spirit through* faith” (Gal. 3:10-14).
* ***Response:*** OCD is an extreme version of “works righteousness.” The compulsive actions are an attempt to “save” oneself from the anxious thoughts, but they fail to save, as do all other “dead works” (Heb. 9:14). On the cross, Jesus bore our curse in all its forms so that we might receive “the blessing of Abraham.” The counselee is invited to REFOCUS on this blessing:
	+ Freedom from self-saving works and complete acceptance with God as righteous in Christ. Justification by faith alone brings peace with God (Rom. 5:1).
	+ The gift of the Spirit to empower new ways of walking free from rules and rituals (Gal. 5:18) in “faith working through love” (Gal. 5:6).

**4. What does God command?**

* ***Scripture:*** “For freedom *Christ has set us free;* stand firm therefore, and *do not submit again to a yoke of slavery…*.For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but *through love serve one another”* (Gal. 5:1, 13).
* ***Response:*** God calls the OCD struggler to RESPOND by “looking up” in faith that there is freedom from enslaved thoughts and behaviors in Christ and then “looking out” for opportunities to serve others. Again, “Faith working through love.”

It is worth repeating that this ***Participate*** part of the process is not a quick fix. It is walking in dependence upon Christ and His Word “in” and “through” the painful experience of OCD. It is continually “looking up” and “looking out,” learning to trust in what Christ has done to set us free and live out that freedom in loving service. It is daily taking steps to resist the impulses of the flesh (Gal. 5:24) and to walk in the power of the Spirit (Gal. 5:16) as “more than conquerors” (Rom. 8:37). Like all aspects of our progressive sanctification, it is imperfect and inconsistent, but it is real and growing and Christ-honoring and ultimately assured.

Let me close with a prayer someone engaged in participating with Christ in learning to walk free might pray: “Lord Jesus, I thank you that you have seen and heard my groaning and have come down from heaven to set me free from all slavery, including OCD. I praise you that you took my sins and broke the power of the curse on the cross. You have forgiven me and fulfilled all righteousness so that I am perfectly and permanently accepted by God—even when I give in to OCD. You have given me a new nature and new power as a new creation by the Holy Spirit. Thank you that you are progressively freeing me from these enslaved thoughts and behaviors. You know I am weak and inconsistent, so please pour out your mercy and grace upon me now. Help me continually look up to you in faith and look out toward others in love. Thank you that the Father will complete the good work He has begun, for His glory and my joy. Amen.”

## **Questions for Reflection**

1. So far, we have looked at four parts to “A Plan and Path for OCD”: Educate, Captivate, Evaluate, and Participate. Which of these do you especially want to think more about and implement?
2. What questions do you have about helping someone struggling with OCD?