

How to Renew Your Mind and Receive Total Well-Being  
of Body, Mind, and Spirit

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## Introduction-

During your daily life, you find yourself embroiled in a spiritual battle—a war waged in unseen realms. Amidst the turmoil, one comforting truth provides hope: Jesus has triumphed in the ultimate war. Despite His victory, the adversary persists in his attempts to deceive and sow destruction in our lives. This relentless conflict plays out within the inner recesses of your mind, where victories are claimed each day through the renewal of your mind with the timeless truths found in God’s Word. It’s through right believing that we are led down the path of victorious living. Armed with spiritual armor, we can repel the enemy’s attacks, rendering them ineffectual against us.

Hello, I’m Dr. Matthew Webster. For five years, I grappled with a debilitating illness encompassing chronic fatigue, brain fog, inflammation, sinus bradycardia, and a myriad of neurological disorders. Despite countless doctor’s appointments, lab work, supplements, and dietary changes, my recovery remained elusive. It wasn’t until I discovered the power of renewing my mind that I began to walk in the healing that Jesus provided for me at Calvary.

Research reveals that stress affects approximately 90% of individuals with chronic illnesses, with genetic factors accounting for only 5% to 10% of diseases.<sup>1</sup> In this book, I will guide you on how to harness the power of your mind to calm the stress receptors in

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<sup>1</sup>Dr. Caroline Leaf. *Cleaning Up Your Mental Mess Chapter One: What Happens When We Don’t Use Our Minds Correctly.* February 24, 2021.



your body. God desires for each of us to live a joy-filled, healthy life. It's time to experience a life filled with strength, happiness, and abundant peace – the life Christ died to give us.

As John 8:36 assures us, "So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed." Believers in Christ have already been set free because of Jesus' victory. My aim in writing this book is to help you experience breakthroughs in areas where you may not feel free. I understand the frustration of longing for healing while feeling perplexed by its delay. Through my journey to wholeness, I've crafted this book to serve as a guide, fast-tracking you to total well-being in body, mind, and spirit.

Imagine being led by the Good Shepherd through your dark valley and into verdant pastures, where rest, strength, and prosperity abound. That's the destination Jesus is leading you toward. May this book be your companion on the journey of renewing your mind, transforming your life, and walking in the victory and strength of the Lord. Amen.

**Part 1: Foundation for Renewing Our Minds**



## Chapter 1 Biblical Insights into Mind Renewal



## What Does the Bible Teach About Mind Renewal?

What does it mean for Christians to engage in the “renewing of the mind”? This question often perplexes many believers, as it’s an aspect of their faith they’ve received little guidance on. Consequently, they may find themselves feeling unfulfilled, frustrated, and confused when striving to live out the abundant life promised by Jesus in John 10:10: “The thief’s purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life.” This richness and satisfaction in life become evident in believers through a single, transformative strategy: the renewing of the mind.

Renewing “anakaínōsis” is a complete change for the better.<sup>2</sup> Simply stated, renewing your mind according to Romans 12:2 means interpreting life through the lens of God’s Word and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, rather than through the lens of your experience, woundedness, trauma, preferences, or the opinions of others. It’s a fundamental shift toward seeing the world, yourself, others, and your heavenly Father through your union life in Christ and what’s possible from a Kingdom perspective. It’s making a daily, moment-by-moment choice to choose to activate the mind of Christ we have (1 Corinthians 2:16) and live as the new creations we have become “more than conquerors” against the evils in this fallen world (Romans 8:37, Ephesians 6:12).

Unless a Christian learns to regularly renew their mind, there is the potential to walk in defeat, to struggle through life, and to be confused about who

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<sup>2</sup>[www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g342/kjv/tr/0-1/](http://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g342/kjv/tr/0-1/)

they are and what has been given them in Christ. Without the renewal of our minds in the truth of Scripture we can easily be filled with thoughts that produce anxiety, anger, fear, hopelessness, self-doubt, and stress, which leads to isolation. When we are isolated from other believers who can encourage us in the faith this is where the devil gets to work attacking our minds. It was when Jesus was alone in the wilderness that the devil came to tempt Him (Matthew 4:1-11). This is why Christian fellowship is an important part of being spurred on to renew our minds.

Hebrews 10:25 states: "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as you see the day approaching."

While many might desire to experience a Spirit-led life of abundance in Christ, they might not possess an understanding that the battle to walk in the Spirit begins with the battle in their mind.

In 2 Corinthians 10:5, the Word of God instructs us to "Destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ." To take a thought captive means to identify and conquer it by comparing it to God's Word. We ask ourselves: Does this thought align with God's promises for my life? If not, we reject its influence and replace it with one of God's promises from Scripture.

In 2 Peter 1:3-4, the Bible reassures us that "His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and goodness. Through these He has

given us His precious and magnificent promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, now that you have escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.”

God’s precious promises enable us to partake in His divine nature. As our thoughts are renewed, new beliefs are birthed, and we become better aligned with God’s plan for our lives. Intentionally altering our thought patterns to harmonize with God’s Word sparks the creation of new neural connections, making this alignment increasingly strengthened over time. Through neuroplasticity, our brains can be reshaped to reflect the truth of God’s Word. Proverbs 23:7 reminds us: “For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he.” Our thoughts, shape our beliefs and actions, and define the limits of our lives. To embrace the abundant life promised by Jesus, we must purposefully engage in the renewal of our minds, there is no other way.

Here’s the good news you have a heavenly Father who loves you and His plans for you are greater than you could ever imagine. This is what you will discover in more depth as you renew your mind. “Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us” (Ephesians 3:20).

### **Win the Battle in Your Mind with Your Spiritual Armor**

As much as we might be tempted to think the struggles in our mind are a physical battle, God’s Word reminds us that it is a spiritual battle we are fighting in.

“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Ephesians 6:12).

Many do not see the correlation between Ephesians 6:12 and the battle in their minds. However, as we work through the preceding verses it becomes clear the spiritual battle happens in our minds.

Before Paul mentions the different pieces of armor that we are given he says: “Finally, be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power” (Ephesians 6:10). When you wield the powerful tools of right believing to overcome the cunning schemes of the devil, the Bible refers to this as being strong in the Lord. The armor of God, as outlined in Ephesians 6:10–20, reveals that placing faith in all that Jesus has accomplished will consistently lead us to triumph over all.

In Ephesians chapter six the Apostle Paul begins with the belt of truth (Ephesians 6:14). When the devil comes against you with his lies about you, gird your waist with the belt of truth. The devil cannot deceive you if you are established in what God’s Word says about you. He can only make inroads into your mind when you don’t know or are unsure about what God’s Word says. Here are a few verses I like to meditate on:

“So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with My righteous right hand. “Look to the LORD and His strength; seek His face always.” God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble” The Sovereign LORD is my strength; He makes my feet like the feet of a deer, He

enables me to tread on the heights. "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power" (Isaiah 41:10, Psalm 46:1, 1 Chronicles 16:11, Habakkuk 3:19, Ephesians 6:10).

The devil will attempt to assail you with various accusations and condemning thoughts, aiming to make you feel guilty and unworthy. However, when you firmly stand in the gift of righteousness, his attacks will be powerless against you. The breastplate of righteousness acts as a shield, protecting your heart from fear, guilt, and condemnation, rendering all of the devil's fiery accusations ineffective.

Did you know that guilt and shame are emotions that come from the frontal and temporal lobes of the cortex? Guilt involves a feeling that you've behaved in a way that you consider to be unacceptable. Shame, on the other hand, is related to feeling that other people will negatively perceive you. Both emotions are very anxiety-provoking.

The enemy will also try to steal the joy that comes from embracing the gospel of peace, symbolized as shoes here. But in those moments, rest assured and have faith that the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet. Each piece of God's armor is a weapon of right believing by which we experience His victory over the devil's mind games.

During the Apostle Paul's time, a Roman shield was massive almost as sizable as a door. Picture now your faith as a robust shield, formidable and impenetrable. As you lift this shield of faith, you become untouchable. Regardless of the multitude of fiery assaults the devil launches, each one is quenched. Unfortunately, many Christians are opting for the shield of doubt, inadvertently quenching the blessings



of God. But you mustn't fall into that trap—embrace your future with boldness, wielding the mighty shield of faith to protect and empower you. Move forward in faith, trusting that you are empowered by God's strength and that He is with you in every battle, granting you victory.

Another area the devil likes to attack in your mind is the area of your salvation. When you come under attack, apart from the shield of faith, be sure to have on the helmet of salvation. The word "salvation" comes from a beautiful Greek word "sōtēria", which includes eternal life, but is an all-encompassing word that means deliverance (from your enemies, diseases, depression, fears, and all evils), preservation, safety, and salvation.<sup>3</sup> So put on the helmet of salvation by meditating on Jesus, and be filled with God's wholeness, protection, healing, and soundness. Let the salvation of the Lord insulate your mind against the enemy's lies.

Lastly, you have also been equipped with the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. Declare His promises and the truth of His grace over yourself and your circumstances to guard your heart against thoughts of hopelessness, despair, and fear. The whole armor of God has everything to do with what you believe in Christ. When you believe rightly about His grace and His finished work, every evil strategy the enemy has against you will surely fail. So be strong in the Lord's love for you. To embark on a victorious life, it is crucial to wholeheartedly embrace the belief that God is on your side and not against you (Romans 8:31).

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<sup>3</sup>[www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g4991/kjv/tr/0-1/](http://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g4991/kjv/tr/0-1/)

## **Ways to Renew Your Mind Today**

- Intentionally “capture” each thought that comes into your mind and compare it to God’s Word and His promises for your life.
- Ask yourself “Does this thought that I’m having right now reflect what God’s Word says about this situation or does it reflect a lie that I know doesn’t represent God’s heart for me?”
- If the thoughts you’re having don’t agree with God’s Word, then replace them with promises from God’s Word. It can be as simple as asking the Holy Spirit to bring to your remembrance a Scripture that is opposite of the lie you may be faced with currently. You can also just do a quick internet search for Scripture verses based on the lie you’re trying to replace. Remember, thoughts are like seeds, and whatever you allow to be planted in the garden of your heart will bring forth a harvest in your life. Choose your seeds wisely.
- Every time you are flooded with those same types of thoughts that don’t agree with God’s best for your life, simply reject them and replace them with God’s Word. One way you can accelerate this process is to write down your newly created Biblical affirmations on note cards, laminate them, and carry them with you for easy access. You can also post them in places that you see often like your office wall, your desk, your car, or even your bathroom mirror. This can feel tedious at first, but as you do so in the context of gratitude, faith, and expectancy, God’s presence will infuse this process, making it more and more natural.
- God created you with an incredible imagination to see, sense, feel, and create new realities in your mind before they ever come into the

physical realm. It's one of the primary ways we co-labor with the Holy Spirit to release His Kingdom in and through our lives. As you are replacing and reinforcing new thoughts based on God's Word, imagine in your mind's eye what it would look like and feel like to experience life within this new reality. This further stimulates your brain and accelerates your ability to come into agreement with God's best for your life.

- Create affirmation statements based on God's Word that, along with your visualization exercises, continue to reinforce the truth of God's Word inside your heart. Over time, your subconscious mind will become convinced of the new truth you're aligning your heart with, rather than the old way you've been living. You can live the abundant life Jesus promised if you master the process of renewing your mind including recognizing the lies of the enemy, intentionally replacing them with the truth of God's Word, and reinforcing that truth through visualization and affirmations. As you do, you'll be amazed at the double doors of favor that seem to instantaneously appear in your life simply because you came into agreement with God's design for your life, rather than trying to make it happen all on your own.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Matt Tommey. What Does the "Renewing of the Mind" Look Like for Christians? [www.biblestudytools.com/bible-study/topical-studies/what-does-the-renewing-of-the-mind-look-like-for-christians.html#:~:text=Simply%20stated%2C%20renewing%20your%20mind%20according%20to%20Romans,woundedness%2C%20trauma%2C%20preferences%2C%20or%20the%20op](http://www.biblestudytools.com/bible-study/topical-studies/what-does-the-renewing-of-the-mind-look-like-for-christians.html#:~:text=Simply%20stated%2C%20renewing%20your%20mind%20according%20to%20Romans,woundedness%2C%20trauma%2C%20preferences%2C%20or%20the%20op) January 24, 2024.

## Small Group Questions

### Chapter 1 Biblical Insights into Mind Renewal

1. What does it mean to renew your mind according to Romans 12:2, and how does this concept differ from interpreting life through personal experiences or the opinions of others?

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2. How do unaddressed negative thought patterns and struggles in the mind impact a Christian's daily life, as mentioned in the text? Can you share any personal experiences or examples that illustrate this?

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3. The text highlights the importance of taking every thought captive to obey Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5). How can Christians practically implement this concept in their daily lives, and what role does Scripture play in this process?

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4. According to the provided text, renewing the mind is both a spiritual and physiological process. How does the understanding of neuroplasticity enhance our comprehension of mind renewal from a Biblical perspective?

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5. The text emphasizes the spiritual battle that takes place in the mind and the significance of putting on the armor of God (Ephesians 6:10–20). How can Christians actively engage in this spiritual warfare, and what practical steps can they take to win the battle in their minds?

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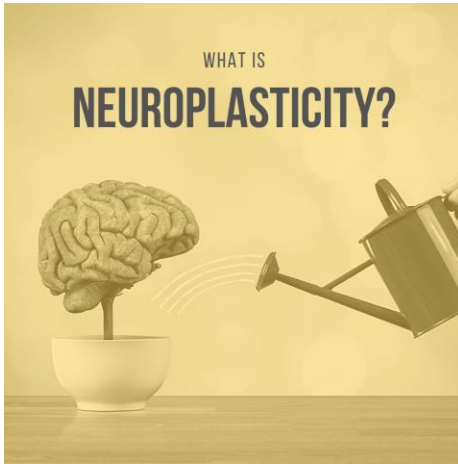
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**Chapter 2**  
**Unpacking the Science of Neuroplasticity: The  
Limbic System Explained and How to Calm it**



## What is Neuroplasticity and How Does it Work?



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Brain rewiring, also known as neuroplasticity, refers to the brain's ability to reorganize its structure and function in response to experiences, learning, and environmental stimuli. Neuroplasticity is your brain's ability to adapt and change. "The

National Library of Medicine defines it as a process that involves adaptive structural and functional changes to the brain. It is defined as the ability of the nervous system to change its activity in response to intrinsic or extrinsic stimuli by reorganizing its structure, functions, or connections after injuries."<sup>6</sup>

Neuroplasticity helps those who suffer from the following conditions:

1. POTS - Postural Orthostatic Tachycardia Syndrome
2. CFS - Chronic Fatigue Syndrome
3. ME - Myalgic Encephalomyelitis
4. FMS - Fibromyalgia Syndrome
5. EHS - Electromagnetic Hypersensitivity
6. PVFS - Post-Viral Fatigue Syndrome
7. SEID - Systemic Exertion Intolerance Disease
8. MCS - Multiple Chemical Sensitivity

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<sup>5</sup>[www.premierneurologycenter.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/436/2022/08/What-is-neuroplasticity.png](http://www.premierneurologycenter.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/436/2022/08/What-is-neuroplasticity.png)

<sup>6</sup>National Library of Medicine. [www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK557811/](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK557811/)



9. CFIDS - Chronic Fatigue and Immune Dysfunction Syndrome

10. Stroke recovery: Neuroplasticity allows the brain to rewire itself to compensate for lost functions after a stroke, facilitating rehabilitation and recovery.

11. TBI Traumatic brain injury

12. Neurological disorders: including Parkinson's disease, Alzheimer's disease, and Multiple Sclerosis.

13. Mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

14. Chronic pain management.

Ultimately, renewing our minds with thoughts from God's Word is a profound blessing for all believers in Jesus, offering countless benefits too numerous to enumerate.

### **We Believe What We Think**

Science has demonstrated that the brain cannot distinguish between mere thoughts, vivid imagination, and actual experiences. This phenomenon explains why, while engrossed in an action-packed movie, one's heart may race and a sense of edginess can arise, despite the events being observed and contemplated not occurring in reality. "The average person is consciously aware of the difference between reality and imagination. However, research suggests that there are parts of the brain and the mind that cannot distinguish between these two. The basic premise behind neuroplasticity is as follows: When you exercise a muscle, it gets stronger; similarly, when you exercise a part of your brain, the neural pathways strengthen. Scientists at Harvard, led by Professor Alvaro Pascual-Leone, found that the mere act of visualization and "imagining the feeling" of an activity (playing five notes on the piano for five consecutive days for 2 hours) increased the size of the

associated brain areas by a factor of 30-40 times. These results are not a coincidence. The aforementioned researches lead us to believe that the neurons don't necessarily realize the differences between what is real and imagined. Even though the brain cells change, we are almost always aware of the act of imagination and objective reality. Thus, understanding of reality is a function of the brain as a whole, while individual cells in the brain cannot distinguish between the two."<sup>7</sup>

Visualization is a potent tool for actualizing desired outcomes. For instance, professional athletes often visualize successfully executing their moves, like seeing the ball go into the basket. When you envision future events, it primes your brain to align with those goals, increasing the likelihood of their realization. Consider setting a goal like exercising; by visualizing yourself confidently lifting weights at the gym, and feeling strong and happy, you're more inclined to take action and workout. Visualization not only cultivates anticipation for future endeavors but also helps overwrite old, unhealthy thought patterns, making room for healthier ones to flourish. By creating positive associations with upcoming events, visualization empowers you to anticipate their positive outcomes.

When feeling nervous about a social situation, envisioning it going smoothly can positively influence your mindset. This visualization fosters feelings of joy,

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<sup>7</sup>Jennifer L. Hillier, M.A LPC. Reality vs. the Story we tell Ourselves: Can your Brain tell the Difference? [www.jenniferhillier.com/blog/reality-vs-the-story-we-tell-ourselves-can-your-brain-tell-the-difference#:~:text=While%20the%20conscious%20can%20definitely%20tell%20the%20difference,that%20the%20mind%20exists%20as%20a%20body-independent%20entity.](http://www.jenniferhillier.com/blog/reality-vs-the-story-we-tell-ourselves-can-your-brain-tell-the-difference#:~:text=While%20the%20conscious%20can%20definitely%20tell%20the%20difference,that%20the%20mind%20exists%20as%20a%20body-independent%20entity.)

peace, and comfort, as your brain doesn't distinguish between imagination and reality. Conversely, dwelling on past stressors can trigger a stress response, leading to increased anxiety or anger. Physiologically, this can result in the release of stress hormones, particularly impactful for those with chronic illnesses.

Brain-wiring is all about future-focused moving forward. It's all about boosting your emotional state by changing what you're focusing on. By shifting focus towards positivity and blessings, one can rewire the mind towards hope and confidence in God's guidance.

While physical health often takes precedence, spiritual and mental well-being are equally crucial. Failing to regulate thoughts can lead to unchecked stress hormones wreaking havoc on various organs, contributing to widespread health issues. Prioritizing mental and emotional health is integral to holistic wellness, ensuring a balanced approach to self-care.

## **10 Principles of Neuroplasticity**

### **1. Use it or Lose it**

Your brain is a network of neural connections. Every thought, action, or skill you practice has a specific set of connections that fire in the brain – but these connections only stay strong if they're used. If you don't use them, they fade and weaken over time.

### **2. Use it and Improve It**

The flip side of "use it or lose it" tells us to practice a skill often (which means you're firing those brain connections more often) to strengthen neural connections over time.

### 3. Specificity

The cells in our brains are called neurons and each is responsible for actions or skills. To promote neuroplastic changes, your therapy exercises need to target parts of your brain in a specific way; you can't just do any old exercise. In rehab, your evidence-based exercises are rooted in research and will improve a specific skill or area of the brain.

### 4. Salience

A fancy way of saying that your exercises should be meaningful to you. Research shows that motivation helps facilitate neuroplastic changes. Because what's meaningful varies from person to person, and your therapy program isn't set in stone, if you're not inspired by an exercise, try something different.

### 5. Transference

Learning a skill in one situation can transfer to another situation – and this is a good thing. Clinicians may talk about “generalizing” (or using) the skills you practice in therapy to daily life activities outside therapy. This is transference.

### 6. Interference

When you practice and improve skills in one area, it can interfere with your ability to improve skills in another area. Don't worry; a licensed counselor knows how to work around this.

### 7. Time

As your brain re-learns skills after an injury, there are times during recovery when you'll see a faster rate of improvement and times when it will seem slower. This is normal neuroplastic healing.

## 8. Age

Our brains are more plastic when we are young, which is why kids pick up skills so rapidly. However, neuroplasticity occurs in adulthood too! In fact, at any age, we have the potential to learn new skills or re-learn lost skills.

## 9. Repetition

Practicing rehab therapy frequently and consistently is key. Just like if you're strength-training by lifting weights and you go to the gym once a month, you won't see much improvement. If you go more frequently, you will. Our brains work the same way.

## 10. Intensity

Intensity works hand-in-hand with repetition. In the gym example, if you use light weights that don't challenge you, you won't see the same results as if you push yourself with heavier weights. Intensity can be the number of times you do an exercise, how long you do it, or how difficult the exercise is. Play around with different intensity parameters to keep your homework interesting!<sup>8</sup>

## **What is Limbic Rewiring?**

"Limbic rewiring" is a term often used in the context of neuroplasticity and therapeutic techniques aimed at rewiring or reprogramming patterns of thought, emotion, and behavior associated with the limbic system, which is involved in emotion, motivation, learning, and memory. While there isn't a standardized set of exercises specifically labeled as "limbic rewiring exercises," there are various types of

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<sup>8</sup>Kleim JA, Jones TA, Principles of experience-dependent neural plasticity: implications for rehabilitation after brain damage, *Journal Speech Lang Hear Res.* 2008 Feb;51(1): S225-39. doi: 10.1044/1092-4388(2008/018).

activities and techniques that may contribute to this process. These exercises often focus on promoting positive emotional states, reducing stress, and fostering healthier thought patterns.

### **Limbic Rewiring Exercises**

Here is a list of limbic rewiring exercises that can be done that will help to overcome negative thoughts that release stress hormones throughout our bodies:

**1. Biblical Affirmations and Mindfulness.** Choose verses from the Bible that speak to the emotions or thought patterns you want to rewire. Repeat these affirmations daily, internalizing the truth of God's Word. For example, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13), for overcoming feelings of inadequacy or fear. Use this time to surrender your worries and anxieties to God, asking for His peace to fill your heart and mind. Focus on breathing deeply and being present in God's presence. Practice mindfulness from a Christian perspective by focusing on God's presence in the present moment. Pay attention to your thoughts and emotions without judgment, inviting God to guide and transform them. Use breath prayers, such as repeating "Lord Jesus, thank You for supplying me with Your strength to overcome my trials today". With each breath center your mind on God. Bring each thought captive as you identify and challenge negative thought patterns and replace them with the promises of God's Word and what you have been given through Jesus' finished work at the cross.

Inhale: "Prince of Peace,"

Exhale: "Calm my heart,"

Inhale: "Sovereign Lord,"

Exhale: "I trust in you."

Inhale: "Heavenly Father,"

Exhale: "Grant me strength,"

Inhale: "Thank You Jesus,"

Exhale: "By Your Stripes, I am healed."

Inhale: "My Good Shepherd,"

Exhale: "Guide my every step."

2. **Gratitude Journaling.** Start and end each day by writing down three things you're grateful for. Focus on acknowledging God's blessings in your life, no matter how small. This practice can help shift your focus away from negative thoughts and emotions.

3. **Contemplative Prayer.** Spend time each day in contemplative prayer. Contemplative prayer is a way to meditate on God's Word and leads to a more intimate relationship with Him.

- Choose a Scripture. Begin with your memory verse for the week.
- Sit comfortably, back straight, chest open so the breath is free and open.
- Read the passage slowly. Savor each phrase. What word, phrase, or idea speaks to you?
- Read the passage again. What insight does this bring to your life?
- Read the passage again.
- Listen quietly.

- Note insights, reflections, and personal responses to the reading in your journal.
- Finish by waiting for a few moments in silence.

Scripture provides a foundation for listening to God. When you meditate on God's Word, you're essentially inviting God to speak through His written Word.

Practice Lectio Divina to become a better listener and learner. Lectio Divina is a method that involves slow, deliberate reading of a passage of Scripture, allowing it to speak deeply to the heart and soul. The goal of Lectio Divina is not simply to gain knowledge about the text but to encounter God's presence and listen to His voice through the words of the Bible.

Lectio Divina typically consists of four main stages or steps: Lectio (reading), Meditatio (meditation), Oratio (prayer), and Contemplatio (contemplation). Here's how you can practice Lectio Divina:

#### 1. Lectio (Reading):

- Choose a short passage of Scripture. It can be a single verse or a few verses.
- Read the chosen passage slowly and attentively. Read it multiple times if needed.
- Listen for any word or phrase that stands out to you. It could be a word that resonates or catches your attention. Attentive listening fosters intimacy with God.

#### 2. Meditatio (Meditation):



- Take the word or phrase that stood out during the reading and meditate on it. Reflect on its meaning and relevance to your life. You can also use a concordance to gain more knowledge of the written word. The Old Testament was written in Hebrew and the New Testament in Greek and a concordance is divided accordingly.
- Consider how the word or phrase relates to your current circumstances, emotions, or spiritual journey.

### 3. Oratio (Prayer):

- Respond to the word or phrase you've meditated on in a personal and conversational way. This can be done through prayer.

Share your thoughts, feelings, questions, and insights with God. Express your desires and longings in light of what you've discovered in the passage. Approach prayer as a conversation, not just a monologue.

### 4. Contemplatio (Contemplation):

- Enter a period of silent contemplation. Let go of your thoughts and words, and simply rest in God's presence. Silence allows the mind to settle and opens a space for God's voice to be heard. It's not about emptying your mind but quieting the noise.
- Allow the Scripture and your reflections to continue resonating within you. Be open to any insights or experiences that may arise during this time of quietness.

### 5. Actio (Action):

- This step is sometimes included in the process. It involves considering how to apply the insights gained from the passage to your life.
- Reflect on any practical steps you can take to live out the wisdom or guidance you've received from God through the Scripture.

I wrote the book, *Overflowing Grace: 100 Blessings to Unleash Your Divine Inheritance and Unveil the New You* as the perfect book to use to practice Lectio Divina. You can order the book through Amazon and easily find it at [www.acts433.com/shop](http://www.acts433.com/shop).

Lectio Divina is a practice that encourages a deep engagement with Scripture, promoting a personal encounter with God through His Word. It's not about rushing through the reading but about dwelling on the text and allowing it to shape your heart and mind.<sup>9</sup>

**4. Progressive muscle relaxation.** One of the most popular muscle relaxation techniques is progressive muscle relaxation which involves focusing on one muscle group at a time. Here is how you can do that:

- Right now, check your jaw, tongue, and lips to see if they're relaxed or tense.
- Consider whether muscle tension is tightening your forehead.
- Determine whether your shoulders are loose, low, and relaxed, or tightened up toward your ears. Some people tense their stomachs as

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<sup>9</sup>Dr. Matthew Webster. *Heavenly Conversations: How Hearing God's Voice Transforms and Blesses Our Lives*. Kindle Direct Publishing. 2024.

though they expect to be punched at any moment. Others clench their fists or curl their toes.

- Take a brief inventory of your entire body to see where you're holding your tension at this moment. Once you have an idea of which areas in your body are vulnerable to muscle tension, you're ready to learn to relax those areas.
- Make sure the whole of your body is comfortably supported - including your arms, head, and feet. (Rest your arms on the arms of the chair, with your feet flat on the floor - if sitting)!
- Close your eyes. Feel the chair supporting your whole body - your legs, your arms, your head.
- Begin by tensing the muscles in your hands by briefly clenching your hands into fists. After a few seconds, let go and try to completely relax your hands, including each finger. Let your hands drop into your lap and feel gravity pulling them down. You may need to wiggle your fingers to relax them.
- Next, focus your attention on your forearms and create tension by making fists again and also tightening your forearm muscles to briefly create muscle tension in your forearms. After just a few seconds, drop your hands into your lap and allow the muscles in your hands and forearms to completely relax. Focus on releasing any tension in your forearms and feeling the heaviness of relaxation.

- Next, move to your upper arms, pulling your hands and forearms close to your upper arms and tensing your biceps. Then completely loosen and relax, allowing your arms to hang at your sides and feeling how the weight of your relaxed hands and arms lengthens your biceps into a relaxed state. Shaking your arms may help release any remaining tension.
- Now turn your attention to your feet and tense them by curling your toes. After a few seconds, release the tension by wiggling or stretching your toes.
- Continue working up through your legs in the same way. Tense your calves by leaving your heels on the ground and flexing your feet and toes upward, then relax by stretching your feet out comfortably.
- Tense your thighs by pushing your feet into the ground, then release and focus on the sensations of relaxation. Then tense and release your buttocks.
- Now move to the muscles in your forehead and tense them by frowning. To relax, lift your eyebrows, then allow them to relax into a comfortable position.
- Next, turn to your jaw, tongue, and lips, clenching your teeth together firmly, pushing your tongue against your teeth, and pushing your lips together. Release the tension in your mouth by allowing it to be slightly open, with your lips and tongue relaxed.

- This is a good time to check to make sure your breathing is still slow and deep. Now tense your neck by tipping your head back. To relax, gently tip your head to one side, then the other, then gently tip your chin toward your chest.
- Next, tense your shoulders by bringing them up toward your ears, then relax completely, allowing the weight of your arms and hands to pull your shoulders down.
- Finally, turn to your torso and tighten the muscles in your abdomen as though bracing for a punch to the stomach. Then relax completely, allowing your stomach muscles to be loose and soft.
- Take a moment to feel the sense of deep relaxation throughout your entire body, then gently stretch comfortably and return to other activities. We recommend that you practice progressive relaxation daily, preferably at least two times per day until you've reduced the time it takes to achieve relaxation to approximately ten minutes.
- Picture all of your stress being released and any ailment, pain, or issue in your body Jesus is bringing healing to that specific part of your body.

John 10:10b: "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." Through Jesus, believers can experience wholeness in every aspect of life—spiritually, emotionally, physically, and mentally.

**5. Mindful Breathing.** The primary goal of mindful breathing is simply a calm, nonjudging awareness, allowing thoughts and feelings to come and go without getting caught up in them.

Let's start by working on our breathing first before we transition into mindful breathing.

Find a comfortable place to sit and relax each muscle. Take a deep, slow breath in and hold it for 5 seconds. Feel your abdomen expand as you do this. Breathe out slowly, to a count of 5. Breathe in again, make every breath slow and steady and the same as the one before it and the one after it. As you breathe out, concentrate on expelling all the air in your lungs. If you're alone, you could make a noise like "whooh" as you do this to help you feel the air being let out. Keep the out-breath going for as long as you can. Keep it relaxed for a few seconds before you inhale again.

Our out-breath releases tension in the chest muscles and allows all muscles to release their tension more easily. Breathing is far more effective when we use our diaphragms, rather than with the chest muscles.

Now place one hand on your chest and the other on your abdomen (hand on navel). Take two or three fairly large breaths – which hand moves first and which moves most? Practice so that it is the lower hand on your abdomen that moves rather than the one on your chest. People often think that their tummy goes in when they breathe in - but the reverse should be the case.

Thoughts will come into your mind, and that's okay because that's just what the human mind does.

Simply notice those thoughts, then bring your attention back to your breathing.

When you're feeling tense or hoping to relax, try breathing out a little bit more slowly and more deeply, noticing a short pause before the in-breath takes over (don't exaggerate the in-breath, just let it happen). You might find it useful to count slowly or prolong a word such as "one" or "peace" to help elongate the out-breath a little (to yourself or out loud).

Stress and anxiety are a part of life, especially during times of uncertainty, but we don't need to be enslaved by our anxiety. We can be freed from our anxiety with the peace of God through having our minds renewed.<sup>10</sup>

Next time you get anxious, consider these suggestions:

1. First slow down. When we are anxious everything speeds up—our thoughts race, our heart pounds, and our breathing accelerates. This makes it difficult to think clearly and make healthy decisions. At the first sign of things speeding up, move a little slower and see what else you can do to intentionally slow things down.

2. Come to your senses. Anxiety lives in our minds and often manifests in the body. When we're anxious we're not connected to where we are. Take a few moments to connect with your five senses. It will help bring you back into the moment. What do you see, hear, smell, taste, and touch?

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<sup>10</sup>Elisha Goldstein. 3 Mindful Ways to Calm an Anxious Mind.

3. Be mindful of a simple task. Life is full of simple tasks: walking, eating, gardening, drinking water, cooking. When we're anxious, we feel out of control. Being mindful of a simple task helps remind us we're in control of our choices. Choose a simple task and it will help reduce the feeling of being out of control.

4. Do a reality check. Anxiety often stems from fear about events that haven't taken place. Our minds are very creative and powerful and often tell stories that aren't true. When you have a catastrophic thought, ask yourself, "Is this thought absolutely true?" Chances are your worst fears are just that—fears, not facts, not the reality of what is happening.

5. Release the critic. Not only is anxiety painful enough, but we often get hit with a second round of self-critical thoughts. A simple question: Do the judgments make you more or less anxious? The answer is almost always, more. When you notice the self-critic, see if you can interrupt it by saying to yourself, "May I learn to be kinder to myself." "May I see myself as God sees me in Jesus."

6. Channel your anxious energy. Like most mental events, anxiety lies on a spectrum. If your anxiety isn't severe, you can channel that energy into something productive. If you're nervously waiting to hear some news, get active—go for a brisk walk, clean, organize, or garden instead.

7. Lie down and look up. This is an age-old trick...a natural experience of mindful awareness sets in when we just lie down, look up at the sky, and watch the clouds. Experience the nature of how all things naturally come and go.



God took Abram outside to help him envision the promise He made to him would come to pass. Genesis 15:5: "He took him outside and said, 'Look up at the sky and count the stars—if indeed you can count them.' Then He said to him, 'So shall your offspring be.'"

The God who made all that we see (look out at the vastness of the sky, the ocean, the landscape around you) has promised to take care of your needs. "And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of His glory in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19).

8. Practice 5×5. In moments of moderate to intense anxiety, the 5×5 practice can come in handy. Go through each of your senses and name five things that you notice about them. In other words, name five things you're seeing, smelling, tasting, feeling, and hearing. This can help interrupt the automatic catastrophic thinking that's fueling the anxiety.

9. Know your triggers. What makes you anxious? Being late? Performing for a crowd? Social situations? If you know your triggers, you can prepare soothing practices better. When the mind feels prepared, it's more at ease.

10. Nurture patience. Impatience is to anxiety as patience is to calm and ease. If you want to create mastery around patience, you need to be on the lookout for impatience and get curious about it. How does it manifest in the body? What has caused it? Patience is a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22). Although you might struggle with patience at times, remind yourself that "Christ living in me is patient and I can allow Him to bear the fruit of patience in my life

right now.” Patience is a pathway to emotional freedom.

When we feel anxious or stressed, it’s our body’s natural response to feeling threatened, the alarm system that helps us deal with danger: our breathing rate increases, as does our blood pressure, heart rate, muscle tension, sweating, state of mental arousal, and adrenaline flow. A lot of the time, we don’t need those survival responses, so relaxation helps to decrease that adrenaline response, to let it go.

Ask yourself:

- What am I reacting to?
- What is it that I think is going to happen here?
- What’s the worst (and best) that could happen?
- What’s most likely to happen?
- Am I blowing things out of proportion?
- How important is this? How important will it be in six months?
- Am I overestimating the danger?
- Am I underestimating my ability to cope?
- Am I mind-reading what others might be thinking?
- Am I believing I can predict the future?
- Is there another way of looking at this?
- Is this fact or opinion?
- What advice would I give someone else in this situation?

- Am I putting more pressure on myself?
- Just because I feel bad, it doesn't mean things are bad.
- What do I want or need from this person or situation?
- What do they want or need from me? Is there a compromise?
- What would be the consequences of responding the way I usually do?
- Is there another way of dealing with this?
- What would be the most helpful and effective action to take (for me, for the situation, for others)?
- Visualize yourself thriving in the situation you feel anxious about.
- See the situation to a successful completion.

6. **Serving Others:** Engage in acts of service and kindness toward others as a way of shifting the focus away from yourself. Volunteer at your church or in your community, visit the elderly, and extend grace and compassion to those in need. Serving others can bring joy and fulfillment, rewiring your brain to focus on love and empathy. If you are too tired to physically serve, a text message, phone call, or an encouraging social media message to someone else can also bring you joy.

"One of the most powerful ways that we can experience a breakthrough in our lives is when we help support others. Engaging in acts of kindness and support for others can shift one's focus off of their

problems. God's generous provisions sometimes flow through people meeting other's needs."<sup>11</sup>

"Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you" (Luke 6:38)."

**7. Community and Fellowship:** Surround yourself with fellow believers who can provide support, encouragement, and accountability on your journey of limbic rewiring. Join a small group Bible study where you can share your struggles and victories, pray together, and grow in faith alongside others. Some churches offer virtual Bible studies which can be beneficial to those who are homebound. Acts 433 Church ([www.acts433.com](http://www.acts433.com)) offers Bible studies throughout the year and each week is independent making it possible to join at any time.

**8. Visualization:** Guided imagery or visualization exercises involve imagining positive scenarios or outcomes to evoke feelings of relaxation and positivity. See Jesus with you in your trial. Visualize Jesus taking your illness, stress, and burden from you. He is healing you and giving you comfort and peace. Imagine His arms opened wide, embracing you with a warm hug. He is smiling at you and He has wonderful plans for you ahead. Thank Him for taking your worries and fears, and replacing them with His great love for you.

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<sup>11</sup>Dr. Matthew Webster. *The Courage to Hope: A Guide to Thrive in Turbulent Times*. Kindle Direct Publishing. 2024.

Here is a sample visualization scenario:

Use your phone to record a video of yourself or someone else reading the following visualization scenario:

Close your eyes and take a few deep breaths to center yourself. Imagine yourself standing in a serene, lush garden filled with vibrant flowers, tall trees, and winding pathways. The air is filled with the sweet scent of blossoms, and a gentle breeze rustles the leaves around you.

As you stand there, feeling the warmth of the sun on your face, you notice a figure approaching from the end of the path. It's Jesus! He walks toward you with a kind and loving expression, radiating peace and compassion.

Jesus comes to stand beside you, and you feel His presence enveloping you with a sense of safety and comfort. He reaches out His hand to touch yours, and as His hand meets yours, you feel a wave of healing energy coursing through your body.

You can sense any pain, fear, or anxiety melting away as Jesus' presence fills you with His love and grace. Take a moment to soak in this healing energy, allowing it to penetrate every part of your being.

Now, Jesus extends His hand once again, inviting you to walk with Him through the garden. As you walk together, you feel lighter and freer, as if burdens have been lifted from your shoulders. Jesus listens intently as you share your heart with Him, pouring out your worries, fears, and hopes.

With each step, you feel His guidance and wisdom infusing your thoughts and emotions. His words bring clarity and perspective, helping you to see yourself and your circumstances through the lens of His love and truth.

As you continue to walk, you notice the beauty of the garden surrounding you in a new light. The colors seem brighter, the scents more intoxicating, and the sounds more melodic. It's as if the garden itself is rejoicing in the presence of the Lord.

Eventually, you come to a tranquil spot in the garden where you sit together in quiet communion. Jesus wraps His arms around you, and you rest in His embrace, knowing that you are deeply loved and cherished.

Take a few more deep breaths, savoring this moment of peace and connection with Jesus. When you're ready, slowly open your eyes, carrying the sense of His presence and healing with you into your day.

**9. Physical Exercise:** Regular physical activity has been shown to have numerous benefits for mental health, including reducing stress and improving mood.

**10. Creative Expression:** Engaging in activities such as art, music, or writing can provide an outlet for emotions and promote self-expression and self-discovery.

By incorporating these exercises into your daily life you can cultivate emotional and mental well-being while deepening your relationship with God. Consistency and practice over time are key to

achieving lasting changes in neural pathways and emotional responses.

Becoming conscious of your thoughts, emotions, and actions elevates your self-awareness. With this awareness, you gain the chance to alter your reactions to situations. Through consistent practice of reshaping our thoughts, we pave the way for the development of new responses.

As you repeatedly embrace more constructive thoughts (engaging in mind renewal), your brain initiates a rewiring process, reinforcing specific neural pathways.

### **Evaluating Your Propensity for Worry**

Worry is a common cause of distress for numerous individuals, especially for those grappling with generalized anxiety disorder. It encompasses both visualizations and thoughts, predominantly geared towards solving anticipated forthcoming challenges. If you often find yourself preoccupied with potential negative scenarios, worry might be a contributing factor to your anxiety. The following assessment aims to assist you in examining your tendency to worry. Please review the statements provided below and mark any that resonate with you:

\_\_\_\_\_ I often find myself excessively worrying about trivial matters.

\_\_\_\_\_ I constantly fixate on the possibility of negative outcomes, no matter how slight.

\_\_\_\_\_ I frequently imagine various potential mishaps in specific situations.

\_\_\_\_\_ Sometimes, I feel that if I don't worry about certain situations, something is bound to go wrong.

\_\_\_\_\_ My mind is often preoccupied with concerns that make it difficult for me to fall asleep.

\_\_\_\_\_ My anxiety tends to lessen during busy periods at work or when engaging in other activities.

\_\_\_\_\_ Occasionally, I worry that my symptoms may be indicative of an undiagnosed medical condition.

\_\_\_\_\_ Even in favorable circumstances, I tend to ponder potential pitfalls.

\_\_\_\_\_ I struggle to fall asleep because of the things I worry about.

\_\_\_\_\_ I often feel a sense of relief when I am engaged in tasks or activities that distract me from my worries.

If several of these statements resonate with you, you likely have a propensity to worry.

Worry primarily consists of thoughts fixated on potential negative outcomes. It often includes mental images or problem-solving scenarios aimed at averting or minimizing anticipated future hardships. Ironically, these efforts to preemptively address problems that may never materialize can intensify anxiety and distress.



Christ calls us not to delay our readiness to engage in Kingdom work until our health challenges or trials are behind us. Waiting for circumstances, including perfect health, to align before embracing peace is futile. It's imperative not to base our lives solely on transient feelings. Instead, entrust your concerns to the One who deeply cares for you.

Imagine God infusing you with the strength necessary to fulfill His calling. Receive His peace and take proactive steps to advance His Kingdom, allowing the radiance of Christ to illuminate your path as you renew your mind and walk in the freedom and victory found in our Lord Jesus Christ.

### **Delay in My Healing**

One reason for my healing being delayed is that I attempted to improve my well-being solely through physical means—taking supplements, adhering to strict diets, undergoing lab tests, and detoxing by cutting out sugars. However, this narrow focus on my physical health took a toll on my spiritual well-being. Paradoxically, concentrating on my physical health failed to enhance it; instead, it exacerbated matters by fostering additional anxiety, fear, and frustration whenever improvement remained elusive. Consequently, my nervous system became hypersensitive, and I found myself perpetually stressed and anxious.

It wasn't until I committed to renewing my mind daily through immersion in the Word of God that I began to experience the peace of the Lord. This intentional practice helped to alleviate my stress responses and shifted my perception, allowing me to view my surroundings with less apprehension and fear.

## **What is Stress?**

“When we hear the word stress, we often think of feeling stressed- of mental or emotional stress. But stress can also be physical, and even mental or emotional stresses involve reactions in the body. Hans Selye the endocrinologist who coined the term “stress” defined it as “the non-specific response of the body to any demand for change.” Another definition defines stress as a response that comes from a gap, real or perceived, between a demand and the ability to meet the demands.”<sup>12</sup>

Stress isn’t solely rooted in negative experiences; many significant milestones in life, such as marriage, childbirth, sending children to college, and more, carry their fair share of stress despite being positive occasions.

Moreover, stress isn’t always triggered by current circumstances; unresolved events from the past may resurface later, offering another chance for resolution.

Chronic stress operates stealthily, undermining your physical well-being. Continued exposure to stressors can detrimentally affect your overall health—mentally, emotionally, and physically—rendering you vulnerable to a plethora of bodily symptoms.

Short-term physical effects of stress include:

- Headaches, or other aches and pains. Changes in your circulatory system can cause distress in all areas of your body. Stress-induced muscle tension can also lead to muscular aches.

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<sup>12</sup>Dan Neuffer. CFS Unravelled. Elednura Publishing. p. 58. 2017.

- Digestive or intestinal distress. Studies have shown that stress changes the way your gastrointestinal system processes food, and chronic stress can also cause changes in appetite.
- Insomnia or other sleep-pattern disruptions.
- Fatigue.
- Changes in sex drive.
- Increased susceptibility to infections. The stress response impedes the immune system, increasing the chance that you'll get colds or other common infections.

Over the long term, the cumulative effect of these smaller problems can produce chronic conditions, including:

- High blood pressure
- Heart disease, heart attacks or strokes
- Diabetes, obesity, or eating disorders
- Impotence or other sexual dysfunction
- Gastrointestinal conditions such as ulcerative colitis, Crohn's disease, or other inflammatory bowel diseases.
- Memory problems. Chronic stress can make your amygdala and hippocampus less efficient and less able to produce new nerve tissue. It may even reduce the size of the hippocampus. These changes can lead to decreased spatial and verbal memory abilities.

- Learning and cognition problems. The changes in the amygdala and hippocampus can result in decreased decision-making and processing abilities, difficulty learning, and susceptibility to behavioral and mood disorders.<sup>13</sup>

There is no miraculous cure in pill form for the myriad symptoms stemming from chronic stress. However, a clear path to recovery exists: renewing our minds will transform our lives (Romans 12:2). In reality, there are few medical cures for serious illnesses. While various treatments and procedures can be helpful, besides antibiotics and certain surgical interventions, doctors cannot simply eradicate ailments. Hence, it's peculiar that many people expect doctors to magically cure their chronic conditions. Doctors aren't magicians; they understand that healing from illness or injury requires time for the body to accomplish. We can accelerate our journey towards total well-being by renewing our minds. This renewal creates the optimal conditions for healing, positioning us to receive the healing power of the Lord through faith.

### **Communion for Healing**

As we receive communion our minds can focus on seeing God's heart for us to walk in divine health and wholeness. Communion does this by focusing us on the finished work of Jesus. "By His wounds we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5b).

Without a revelation of the significance of communion and its transformative effects on our minds and bodies, many can fail to receive the healing made available in Jesus as this is what happened in Corinth,

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<sup>13</sup>United Brain Association. Stress, the Silent Killer. May 1, 2019. [www.unitedbrainassociation.org/2019/05/01/stress-the-silent-killer/](http://www.unitedbrainassociation.org/2019/05/01/stress-the-silent-killer/)

“Many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep” (1 Corinthians 11:30).

Sin has negatively impacted this world bringing with it the sentence of sickness and death. Holy Communion is God’s provision for us so that we don’t have to suffer the sickness and death that the world is suffering.

God has given you the provision you need for total well-being through the body and blood of His Son. Jesus’ blood was shed for the remission of our sins. His body was beaten so we might be given His divine health and wholeness. We do get sick sometimes, but we can be sure that when we are sick, it is not God’s will for us. We don’t have to wonder, “Maybe God gave me this sickness to teach me something.” Sickness is a curse. There was no sickness or death until Adam sinned. Sickness and death began as Adam and Eve partook of the fruit (Genesis 3:6). Healing in our lives comes through God’s provision for our sin, Jesus Christ. As we eat the bread and wine/juice, we remember the sacrifice Jesus made for us to receive His spiritual and physical salvation.

“For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God’s abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:17)!

The number one thing Jesus did besides preaching/teaching was healing all who were sick. God’s will is to bless mankind in Christ, and one way this is done is through physical healing. Consider the following verses.

Matthew 4:23-24: “And He went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the Gospel of the Kingdom and healing every disease

and every affliction among the people. So His fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought Him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, those having seizures, and paralytics, and He healed them.”

Psalm 103:2-3: “Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases.”

Isaiah 53:4-5: “Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was pierced for our transgressions; He was crushed for our iniquities; upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with His wounds we are healed.”

James 5:14-15: “Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.”

1 Peter 2:24: “He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By His wounds you have been healed.”

I would recommend taking some time out to receive communion as communion is a sign of the health, wholeness, and every provision that we have in Jesus. Pray, take communion, sing God’s praises, and get into the Word and you will be amazed as Christ displaces worry at the center of your life. Once your gaze shifts off of your need and onto the source of all you need, you are experiencing the renewal of your

mind.<sup>14</sup>

### **Do You Believe God Can and Will Heal You?**

We must not believe the lie that recovery isn't possible. The beginning for you to believe that you are going to be healed starts with dispelling the lie that your recovery is not possible. "With God, all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26).

Matthew 9:27-30: "As Jesus went on from there, two blind men followed him, calling out, "Have mercy on us, Son of David!" When He had gone indoors, the blind men came to Him, and he asked them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?"

"Yes, Lord," they replied. Then He touched their eyes and said, "According to your faith let it be done to you"; and their sight was restored."

The notion that your recovery is unattainable wasn't as convincing on the day you first fell ill. However, as time passes and every conceivable effort fails, it becomes increasingly challenging to hold onto any other belief. While there are beneficial actions we can take in our journey toward recovery, such as exercising and maintaining a healthy diet, our primary responsibility is to renew our minds and allow God to manifest supernatural healing in our bodies. One of the biggest things to set you up for success is to allow yourself to believe. Maintain hope that in a month, you'll feel better than you do now. Envision yourself achieving tasks in the coming months that once seemed impossible. Rest assured that whatever God calls you to do, He will empower you to accomplish it.

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<sup>14</sup>Dr. Matthew Webster. Living in Victory. Kindle Direct Publishing. 2023.

Step by step, day by day, let God's Word empower you to take action and move forward. Small steps lead to significant progress over time. What began as a brisk walk for me evolved into a jog, then eventually into running. A single lap around the track multiplied into four, and soon enough, I was participating in 5k races. As you build up your physical and mental strength, you'll find yourself capable of accomplishing more.

There are two main internal hurdles we must address: feeling overwhelmed and managing unrealistic expectations. I recall when I was unwell, it felt like I was constantly operating at 120% of my capacity, even during periods of inactivity. The demands seemed endless, while my energy was scarce. The pain was overwhelming, and the lack of resources only fueled frustration, leading to depression and other negative emotions. Give yourself grace and break tasks down into manageable steps. Remember, your role isn't to heal yourself; it's to receive healing from the Lord as you renew your mind. Strive for progress, not perfection. Celebrate each positive step forward, and give thanks to God for enabling your journey of recovery. Let these small steps reinforce your belief that you are healed in Jesus' name, and each step forward is evidence of the physical salvation granted by the Lord. Begin to verbalize what the Lord is doing in your life to others. Share your testimony as it will encourage others who are going through their battles and be willing to pray for others and to ask for prayers yourself. "Would you join me in prayer, believing God is bringing to me total well-being of my body, mind, and spirit?"



## **Evaluating Your Inclination Towards Perfectionism**

Setting excessively high standards for yourself or others is certain to elevate your anxiety levels. Since perfection is unattainable, lofty standards often result in setting yourself up for disappointment. This evaluation aims to assist you in gauging whether perfectionism could be a concern for you. Please review the following statements and mark any that resonate with you:

\_\_\_\_\_ Others consider me extremely conscientious and meticulous as a worker.

\_\_\_\_\_ I usually have a specific way of doing something and find it challenging to deviate from that approach.

\_\_\_\_\_ When others are watching me, I worry about embarrassing myself.

\_\_\_\_\_ I rarely achieve a level of performance that satisfies me.

\_\_\_\_\_ I feel the need to be tough on myself, believing it's the only way to be good enough.

\_\_\_\_\_ I struggle to let go of mistakes I make.

\_\_\_\_\_ I have high standards for myself and typically hold myself to them.

\_\_\_\_\_ When I'm wrong, I feel deeply embarrassed and ashamed.

\_\_\_\_\_ Despite external recognition of my diligence, I often feel internally dissatisfied with my performance.

\_\_\_\_\_ I frequently experience a sense of inadequacy, even when I meet my high standards.

If many of these statements resonate with you, you may encounter challenges related to perfectionism.

### **Your Adversaries are Overmatched**

Goliath didn't stand a chance against David. We tend to think of David as the underdog in the story but the real truth is that Goliath didn't stand a chance against David. We label David as an underdog not only because Goliath is a seasoned warrior while David is merely a shepherd, but primarily because Goliath is equipped with advanced weaponry—a gleaming coat of armor, a sword, a javelin, and a spear—while David possesses only a humble sling. Goliath was much taller and much stronger than David.

There is something important to know about the types of warriors and how the landscape of the battle would give each type of fighter distinct advantages in combat.

Some people fought with:

- Slings and arrows- such as archers (David)
- Swords- such as foot soldiers who were good at up-close combat (Goliath)
- Warriors on horseback

Goliath was a foot soldier; David was a slinger. When we put it this way, and you note that Goliath and David were fighting from somewhat of a distance, it makes David's weapon choice seem smart. He's good at attacking with accuracy from afar.

It also makes you understand why Goliath was in trouble the moment David whipped out his sling. If David never got close to him, how could Goliath attack and defeat him?

Goliath's expectation when he challenges the Israelites to a duel is that he's going to be fighting another heavy infantryman. When he says, "Come to me that I might feed your flesh to the birds of the heavens and the beasts of the field" (1 Kings 16:4). The key phrase is "Come to me."

Come up to me because we're going to fight, hand to hand. King Saul has the same expectation as he tries to give David his armor best suited for infantry foot soldiers (1 Samuel 17:38-39).

Why would David choose to fight this way? As a shepherd, his experience using a sling to defend his sheep from wild animals prepared him to confront Goliath in a similar manner. Although he was facing a life-and-death battle, David was confident because he believed that the victory belonged to the Lord.

The popular moral of the story of David vs Goliath is: "Get out there and face down your giant". However, this interpretation misses the mark. David was indeed courageous when he faced Goliath, however, David's courage was a derivative virtue, meaning it came out of something other than himself because courage is not a self-generated virtue. Courage is always produced by faith. Courage stems from believing in

something that will help us produce the result we are looking for.

In the preceding chapter, Samuel the prophet informed David that God had chosen him to be the next king of Israel and anointed him with his brothers around him (1 Samuel 16:13). David knew this information when he arrived at camp and heard Goliath's rants. David drew additional confidence by remembering how God had helped him in the past (1 Samuel 17:34–36) and also the promise he had to be king.

David was not self-confident; he was God-confident. David believed that God would never break His promise, and if Goliath made himself an obstacle to God's promise, God could flick him out of the way with a pebble. David saw God as bigger and stronger than the fearful Philistine. So, he went out to fight knowing that God would give him victory over Goliath — and when he did, the victory would demonstrate God's power and faithfulness, not David's courage (1 Samuel 17:46–47).

1 John 4:4 reads: "You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the One who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world." Whatever adversary has come against you will be defeated. You don't need to be confident in your ability to fight, you only need to be confident in the Lord. Renew your mind with the truth of God's Word and witness the victory of the Lord in your life.

## **Well-Being Assessment**

On a scale of 1 to 5 which best describes your experience over the last two weeks for each of these 10 statements?

None of the time = 1  
Rarely = 2  
Some of the time = 3  
Often = 4  
All of the time = 5

I have been feeling optimistic about the future.

\_\_\_\_\_

I've been thinking clearly.

\_\_\_\_\_

I've been feeling confident.

\_\_\_\_\_

I've been feeling relaxed.

\_\_\_\_\_

I have energy to spare.

\_\_\_\_\_

I have been feeling useful.

\_\_\_\_\_

I have been dealing well with problems.

---

I have been engaged in conversation with others.

---

I have been feeling close to other people.

---

I have been feeling good about myself.

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Simply covering up symptoms, certainly is not the same thing as being well. What is the source of your problem? Think about it. It's critical when dealing with any problem. If you come home to water on your kitchen floor every day, why would you bother continuing to mop it up without first finding out where the water is coming from? A central issue that might need to be addressed is the autonomic nervous system dysfunction and how you might return it to normal functioning. Once the nervous system resets, and once it normalizes most of the secondary dysfunctional symptoms dissolve. The exercises found throughout this book will lead you to renew your mind creating the right environment for the autonomic nervous system to normalize and regain normal function.

If you're suffering from fatigue or pain, there may be a whole range of different reasons for this. It is important to first be checked out by a doctor.

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A family member of mine was struggling with fatigue and decided to see a doctor, who discovered low iron levels. After starting an iron supplement and switching to cast iron cookware, their levels returned to normal, and their energy improved significantly. If they hadn't sought medical help, they would have remained low on energy, unaware of a simple solution to their health issue. Moreover, this visit helped prevent them from spiraling into negative thoughts like "I have cancer" or "I won't live to see my next birthday." Regular check-ups are essential for maintaining good health and catching issues before they become serious. It's important to prioritize routine visits to your doctor, but also to spend time with Jesus Christ, your Great Physician, who provides divine healing and life. By addressing initial concerns, like autonomic nervous system dysfunction, we can set the stage for improvements in other areas of our health.

### **Sympathetic and Parasympathetic Nervous System Explained**

The autonomic nervous system is responsible for regulating bodily functions. It's a control system, largely below consciousness, affecting things like your heart rate, digestion, respiratory rate, salivation, perspiration, capillary dilation, urination, and sexual arousal. And some of these work with a degree of conscious control like breathing, swallowing, and so on. However, the vast majority happens on an unconscious level. So, the autonomic nervous system affects every major system in our body. When you have an autonomic nervous system dysfunction it is known as dysautonomia.

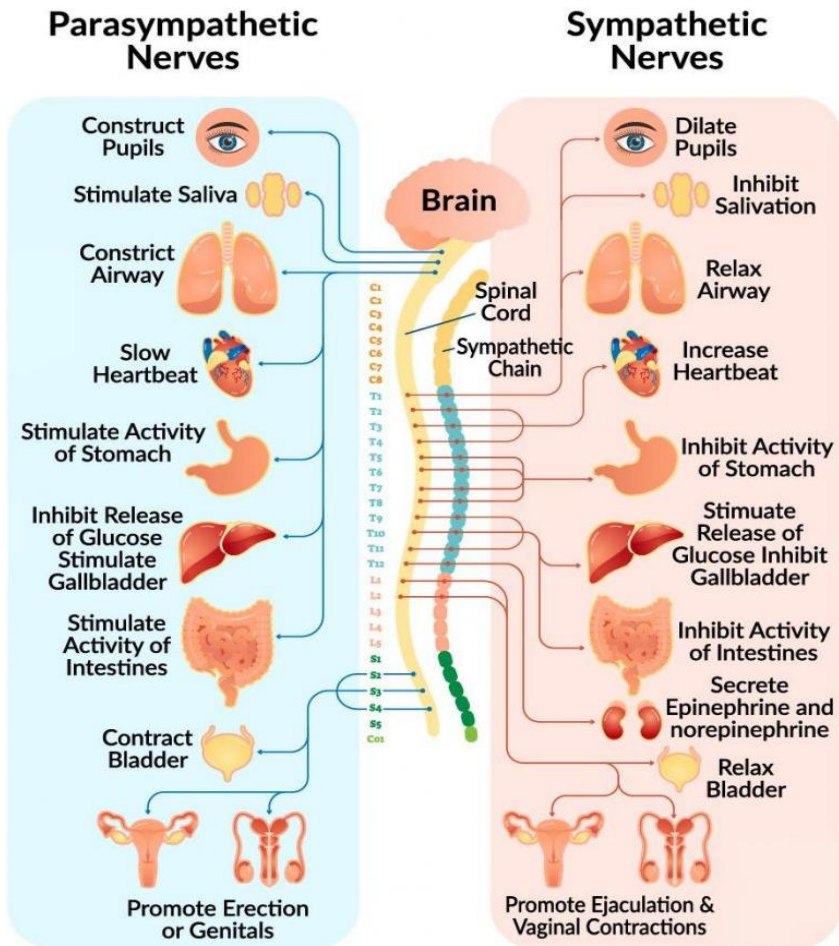
The autonomic nervous system ensures that your body is ideally responding and coping with its environment when it's hot, when it's cold, when you

have to work hard physically, or mentally, and even when you need to rest. The A.N.S. (autonomic nervous system) makes sure that your body functions properly and responds to its environment, and that it responds to demands that you place on your body. So, it is central to ensuring your body stays within the reasonable limits of homeostasis that support life.

### **Polyvagal Theory**

The polyvagal theory is the traditional view of the autonomic nervous system presented as a two-part system: the parasympathetic nervous system, which supports health, growth, and restoration “rest and digest” and the sympathetic nervous system is often described as the part that mobilizes the fight or flight response. The sympathetic nervous system is responsible for increasing your heart rate and also creating many hormonal expressions which are in response to danger or injury. The parasympathetic nervous system can be considered the opposite of the fight or flight response.





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We all want to land in the healthy parasympathetic state also known as rest and digest and sometimes referred to as social engagement.

This “social engagement system” is a hybrid state of activation and calming that plays a role in our ability to socially engage.

<sup>15</sup>[www.mariskaodendaal.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/e43f1dc641b8beb7a903452e12ffcb87-872x1024.jpg](http://www.mariskaodendaal.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/e43f1dc641b8beb7a903452e12ffcb87-872x1024.jpg)

The "rest and digest" response is a physiological state that is activated by the parasympathetic nervous system (PNS). The goal of the "rest and digest" response is to promote relaxation, recovery, and conservation of energy in the body, contrasting with the "fight or flight" response activated by the sympathetic nervous system (SNS).

Here's how it works:

1. Parasympathetic Nervous System Activation: When the body is in a state of rest, such as after a meal or during periods of relaxation, the parasympathetic nervous system becomes dominant. This occurs through the release of neurotransmitters such as acetylcholine, which act on specific receptors in target organs.

2. Stimulation of Vagus Nerve: The vagus nerve, which is the longest cranial nerve, plays a crucial role in activating the parasympathetic nervous system. It innervates various organs, including the heart, lungs, stomach, and intestines. Activation of the vagus nerve leads to a decrease in heart rate and stimulation of gastrointestinal activity, promoting digestion and nutrient absorption.

3. Effect on Organs: The parasympathetic nervous system influences several organs and bodily functions to facilitate the "rest and digest" response:

- Digestive System: It increases saliva production, stimulates gastric acid secretion, and enhances peristalsis, the rhythmic contractions of the digestive tract that propel food through the intestines.

- Cardiovascular System: It decreases heart rate and blood pressure, allowing the body to conserve energy.

- Respiratory System: It promotes bronchoconstriction and reduces respiratory rate, contributing to a sense of relaxation and calmness.

- Genitourinary System: It stimulates bladder contraction and relaxation of the urinary sphincters, facilitating urination.

4. Overall Relaxation and Recovery: By activating the “rest and digest” response, the body shifts its resources toward functions that promote relaxation, digestion, and recovery. This state allows the body to conserve energy, repair tissues, and maintain homeostasis.

In the social engagement state (rest and digest), we feel very mindful and aware of what’s going on around us. Our mind isn’t racing about the past or the future, we feel very present in the moment and we feel joyful and compassionate.

Remember that achieving a state of “rest and digest” is a gradual process and may require consistent practice and experimentation to find which exercises work best for you to renew your mind.

Consider the vital role played by the Autonomic Nervous System (A.N.S.) in sustaining life. If the A.N.S. were to cease functioning altogether, it would result in death. However, envision the repercussions if its function were merely compromised. In the event of a physical mishap for an otherwise healthy individual, the autonomic nervous system springs into action, triggering the fight or flight response. This manifests in increased heart rate, muscle tension, elevated blood pressure, and heightened blood sugar levels. Additionally, it releases potent hormones like cortisone, which curtail inflammation within the body.

Yet, this immune suppression can lead to symptoms like fatigue, susceptibility to colds, or intense muscle tension in the neck and upper back. Such responses are typical when individuals encounter physical or psychological stress. However, continuous activation of the sympathetic response, or an exaggerated reaction, can precipitate conditions like chronic fatigue syndrome.

In certain scenarios, the autonomic nervous system can swing to the other extreme, triggering an intense version of the “rest and digest” response, also known as the parasympathetic response. When this response malfunctions severely, it may lead to phenomena like fainting, often termed the ventral vagal response or vagal attack. Excessive parasympathetic activity can manifest in various physical symptoms, including dizziness, nausea, extreme temperature sensations, sweating, ringing in the ears, palpitations, mental fog, confusion, speech difficulties, visual disturbances, and a sense of unease. While some theories have attributed these symptoms to an overactive sympathetic nervous system, research indicates otherwise. Many tests reveal low cortisol levels in the morning, contributing to difficulty waking up—an indication contrary to sympathetic overactivity. In reality, both excessive parasympathetic and sympathetic reactions may be at play. If you find yourself battling feelings of fatigue followed by periods of heightened alertness, this intricate interplay between these two systems could be the underlying cause.

One thing many people don't realize is that stress accumulates in the body, which if pushed too far, leads to the tipping point, the tipping point is where the autonomic nervous system dysfunction begins. This is becoming more and more common nowadays.

One reason is that 67% of people who experienced long COVID are experiencing dysautonomia.<sup>16</sup>

2 Timothy 3:1: "You should know this, Timothy, that in the last days there will be very difficult times."

## **Dysautonomia and Determining How I Got It**

Experiencing the onset of my initial neurological disorders was quite startling. Yet, upon identifying the events that triggered my tipping point, it became clear why my body was manifesting a diverse array of symptoms.

Here are the stressors that strained my body and precipitated my initial dysfunction in the autonomic nervous system, along with other events that culminated in my relapse.

### Initial A.N.S. Dysfunction

- Chronic fatigue, brain fog, and inflammation caused by 1<sup>st</sup> strain of COVID-19
- Anxiety, worry, and fear that were driven by sheltering in place, separated and isolated from loved ones
- Grief caused by the death of sister

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<sup>16</sup>Shanet Susan Alex. Study finds 67% of individuals with long COVID are developing dysautonomia. [www.news-medical.net/news/20220501/Study-finds-6725-of-individuals-with-long-COVID-are-developing-dysautonomia.aspx](http://www.news-medical.net/news/20220501/Study-finds-6725-of-individuals-with-long-COVID-are-developing-dysautonomia.aspx) May 1, 2022.

### Relapse

- Exhaustion from planning and hosting a funeral at our home during COVID restrictions
- Nearly drowning in a hot tub accident
- Stepping on a giant nail led to running differently in a 5k race and tearing my plantar fascia

### Second A.N.S. Dysfunction

- Heart damage (diagnosed sinus bradycardia) and vast neurological issues from COVID-19 booster shot

### Relapse

- Hospitalization with no answers/ hope
- Nearly avoiding a head-on collision on the freeway with a woman driving the wrong way down the ramp
- Knee injury preventing the ability to run again
- Botched medical procedure

You might find it helpful to write down events that transpired that could have pushed your autonomic nervous system to the tipping point. When I understood the events that led me to experience dysautonomia, this knowledge was a helpful part of my recovery journey as it normalized my experience and connected me with others who had similar experiences. If you find that writing down the events that brought you to your tipping point triggers negative emotions instead of bringing you a sense of discovery and curiosity, feel free to skip this exercise.

If you are curious about finding out more details about my health challenges I share them in more detail in

the first chapter of the book, "The Courage to Hope: A Guide to Thrive in Turbulent Times."<sup>17</sup>

What caused your A.N.S. dysfunction will be different from mine. Other factors play into it as well that could go as far back as your childhood. Quite often it's several things that happen all at once, like the perfect storm.

# NEUROPLASTICITY CAN RESULT FROM:

The infographic features ten categories of factors that lead to neuroplasticity, each represented by a small illustration in a rounded square frame. The categories are arranged in two rows of five. The top row includes: Stressful Circumstances (a person at a desk), Social Interactions (people at a table), Traumatic Events (a person at a funeral), Emotions (four faces showing different expressions), and Meditation & Prayer (a person in prayer). The bottom row includes: New Experiences (a person kayaking), Exercise (a person at a gym), Nutrition (a bowl of healthy food), Learning Activities (a person at a computer), and Daily Thoughts (a person holding a book). The background is dark blue with a network of white nodes and lines.

Stressful Circumstances    Social Interactions    Traumatic Events    Emotions    Meditation & Prayer

New Experiences    Exercise    Nutrition    Learning Activities    Daily Thoughts

## “Neurons That Fire Together, Wire Together”

We can rewire our brain for the better through positive inputs into each of these areas.  
We can also wire our brain for pain, negativity and degeneration through negative inputs in these areas.

Some triggers may operate on a subconscious level, where you may not be fully aware of their influence. However, by bringing them into conscious awareness,

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<sup>17</sup>Dr. Matthew Webster. The Courage to Hope: A Guide to Thrive in Turbulent Times. Kindle Direct Publishing. 2026.

you can better address them and their underlying issues. If you've been grappling with symptoms without delving into the root cause of dysfunction, your efforts may only provide temporary relief, with problems likely to resurface. While enhancing gut health with prebiotics and probiotics can be beneficial, it's crucial to identify and tackle the factors contributing to dysfunction directly. Treating Autonomic Nervous System (ANS) dysfunction effectively necessitates addressing the root cause, rather than solely managing symptoms and secondary dysfunctions.

The encouraging news is that this can be reversed and normalized, as the brain possesses plasticity—the ability to change and adapt throughout life.

Any illness experienced isn't solely attributable to stress, whether mental or otherwise. It originates from a complex interplay of primary, secondary, and even tertiary dysfunctions. Thus, merely reducing stressors or avoiding triggers is unlikely to result in recovery. Many individuals adopt a restricted lifestyle, pacing themselves and sidestepping stressors in hopes of alleviating symptoms. While this approach may offer temporary relief, it often exacerbates the condition over time. True recovery entails fostering positive neuroplasticity—retraining our nervous system responses, dismantling conditioned reflexes, and addressing the underlying causes of our symptoms to facilitate effective healing.

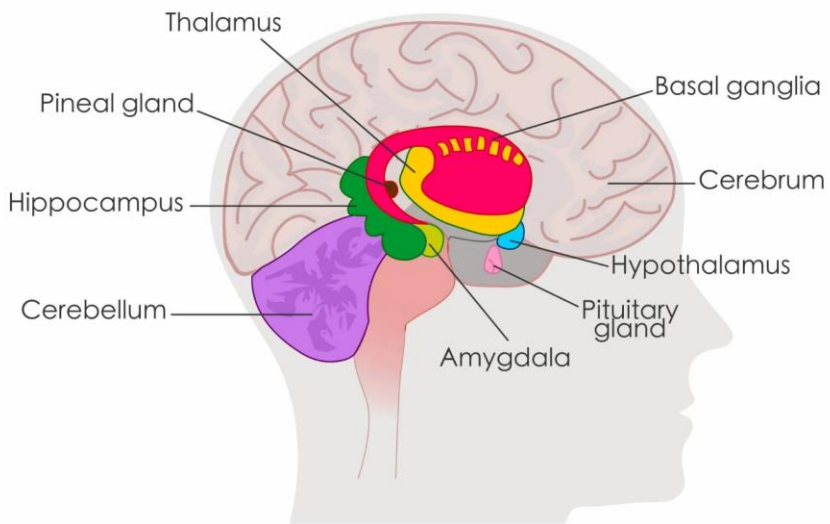
To effectively rewire our brains, it's valuable to gain an understanding of the intricate design of the brain as fashioned by God. While exploring the complexities of the limbic system may seem daunting, comprehending its various components and functions



can shed light on how the challenges we face may be linked to this system. In this book, my aim is to assist you in addressing specific areas of the limbic system that may be contributing to difficulties, while also offering insight into how calming the limbic system can promote healing in the body. By aligning our bodies with God's intended functionality, we position ourselves to receive more from Him and embrace the abundant lives He desires for us.

## **Role of the Limbic System Revealed**

# Limbic System



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## **Hippocampus**

The hippocampus consists of two structures on each side of the brain that serve as memory centers. These structures consolidate information that goes to parts of the cerebral cortex for storage.

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<sup>18</sup>[www.simplypsychology.org/wp-content/uploads/limbic-system.jpg](http://www.simplypsychology.org/wp-content/uploads/limbic-system.jpg)

The hippocampus forms short-term, long-term, and spatial memory, helping people to navigate their environment. It is also involved in the learning process. While the hippocampus is closely connected to the cortex and interacts with it in memory processing, it is not a part of the cortex itself.

### **Cingulate gyrus**

The cingulate gyrus also helps with emotions, memory, and learning. It specifically links outcomes with behavior, allowing people to see the cause and effect of their actions. As a result, the area may also play a role in the ability to predict adverse outcomes or sensations, enabling people to avoid them. The cingulate gyrus may control autonomic motor functions, which are involuntary movements, such as those involved in digestion and breathing.

### **Amygdala**

The amygdala lies next to the hippocampus. It is responsible for processing emotions, such as:

- anger
- happiness
- anxiety
- fear

The amygdala also helps with interpreting experiences and creating memories by attaching emotions to them. Other functions include learning to avoid fearful stimuli and contributing to the fight-or-flight response.

The amygdala also has links with the olfactory system or a person's sense of smell. It processes information about smells and tastes.

### **Cortex (Cerebral Cortex):**

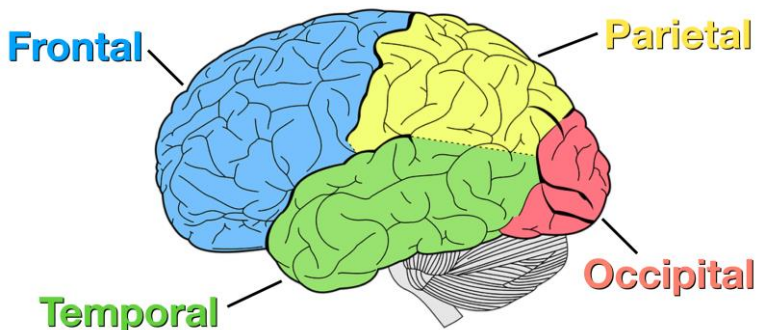
The cortex, also known as the cerebral cortex, is the outer layer of the brain responsible for higher-level brain functions such as thought, memory, and consciousness. It covers the cerebrum, which is the largest part of the brain.

**Higher Cognitive Functions:** The cortex, the outer layer of the brain, is responsible for a wide range of higher-level cognitive functions, including:

- Consciousness
- Thought processes
- Reasoning
- Language
- Perception
- Voluntary movement
- Problem-solving

**Sensory Processing:** Different regions of the cortex process sensory information from the environment, including vision, hearing, touch, taste, and smell.

**Cerebral Cortex = Outer Grey Matter Layer**



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The cortex operates in a completely different way than the amygdala, but its responses and circuitry can

prompt the amygdala to produce anxiety. Confusing a thought with reality is a very seductive process due to the cortex's tendency to believe it possesses the real meaning of every thought, emotion, or physical sensation. In reality, you need not take every thought or emotion you have seriously. You can allow many thoughts and emotions to simply pass without undue attention or analysis. Distressing thoughts are more likely to come from the left side of the cortex, which is the dominant hemisphere for language in most people. Logical reasoning, which is produced in the left hemisphere, underlies both worry and verbal rumination (Engels et al. 2007).<sup>20</sup>

## **Hypothalamus**

The hypothalamus helps to maintain homeostasis or a steady internal state. It controls:

- blood pressure
- heart rate
- body temperature
- sexual activity
- thirst
- hunger

The hypothalamus maintains homeostasis by taking information from different parts of the brain, as well as responding to stimuli such as odor, light, and stress.

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<sup>20</sup>Engels, A. S., W. Heller, A. Mohanty, J. D. Herrington, M. T. Banich, A. G. Webb, and G. A. Miller. 2007. "Specificity of Regional Brain Activity in Anxiety Types During Emotion Processing." *Psychophysiology* 44:352–363

The hypothalamus also connects to regions of the brain involved in decision-making, creating an “interface” between the emotional parts and the thinking or cognitive parts of the brain.

### **Basal ganglia**

The primary function of the basal ganglia is to regulate involuntary movements, including balance control and eye movements.

The parts of the basal ganglia that lie in the limbic region contribute to emotional behaviors and thinking. They also influence the brain’s reward system and help with reinforcement, which can play a role in habit formation.

### **Thalamus**

**Sensory Gateway:** The thalamus serves as a relay station for sensory information, directing sensory inputs from the body to the cortex and other parts of the brain.

### **Mammillary Bodies**

The mammillary bodies are a pair of small round bodies. They consist of two groups of nuclei, the medial mammillary nuclei, and the lateral mammillary nuclei. Mammillary bodies are connected directly to the brain, relaying impulses to the thalamus. They are important for recollective memory and play a pivotal role in the encoding, consolidation, and retrieval of memories, particularly declarative memory. The mammillary bodies are connected to other parts of the brain and act as a relay for impulses coming from the amygdala and hippocampi via the mammillo-thalamic tract to the thalamus.

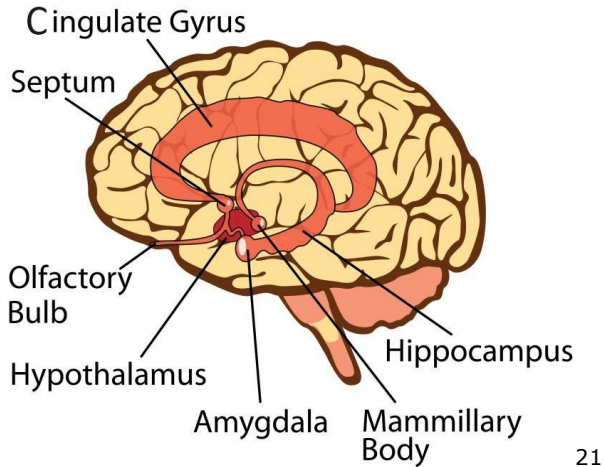
## **Olfactory Bulb**

The olfactory bulb, which is part of the limbic system, is primarily responsible for associating smells with memories. The limbic system is a set of brain structures involved in emotion, behavior, motivation, and memory. It includes the olfactory bulb, hippocampus, amygdala, and other structures.

When we encounter a smell, the olfactory bulb processes the sensory information and sends it to various regions of the brain, including the hippocampus and amygdala. The hippocampus is involved in forming new memories, while the amygdala plays a role in processing emotions.

These brain regions work together to link the smell with past experiences, emotions, and memories stored in the brain. As a result, certain smells can trigger vivid memories and emotions associated with past events, places, or people. This phenomenon is often referred to as the "Proustian effect," named after the French writer Marcel Proust, who famously described how a madeleine cake dipped in tea evoked a flood of memories from his childhood.

## LIMBIC SYSTEM STRUCTURES



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### **Limbic System Damage**

Usually, there's a perfect storm of stressors, emotional, mental, environmental, physical lifestyle, etc... that leads up to being stuck in this chronic fight-flight or freeze stress response that leads to this limbic system dysfunction. And when your body's been through all the stressors it can handle the limbic system goes out of balance. One of the biggest stressors in your life can be your thoughts. What doctors have discovered is that damage to different parts of the limbic system has different effects. For example:

- **Hippocampus:** Damage to this part of the brain disrupts memory and learning, and it can contribute to dementia symptoms. In

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<sup>21</sup>[www.images.wisegeek.com/hippocampus-labeled-on-diagram-of-brain.jpg](http://www.images.wisegeek.com/hippocampus-labeled-on-diagram-of-brain.jpg)

Parkinson's disease, damage here can worsen thinking skills.

**Memory Formation:** The hippocampus is critical for the formation and consolidation of new memories, particularly episodic and spatial memories.

**Spatial Navigation:** It plays a role in spatial memory and navigation, helping us remember the layout of environments and find our way from one place to another.

**Learning:** The hippocampus is involved in various forms of learning, including declarative and relational learning.

- **Cingulate gyrus:** Harm here results in inappropriate emotions, such as a lack of fear. It also causes impairments in learning and pain perception.
- **Amygdala:** Harm to the amygdala can also affect a person's fear conditioning, as well as their ability to regulate their emotions.
- **Emotion Processing:** The amygdala plays a central role in processing emotions, particularly fear and aggression. It helps to assess the emotional significance of stimuli and generates appropriate emotional responses.
- **Memory Formation:** It is involved in the formation and storage of emotional memories, particularly those associated with fear or other strong emotions.



- **Social and Sexual Behavior:** The amygdala also influences social and sexual behavior, including bonding, aggression, and mate selection.
- **Hypothalamus:** Damage here causes atypical functioning that links to several mental health conditions. Underactivity may worsen depression, and hyperactivity may cause excessive anxiety.
- **Regulation of Basic Biological Functions:** The hypothalamus regulates various autonomic and endocrine functions, including:
  - - Body temperature
  - - Hunger and thirst
  - - Sleep and wakefulness
  - - Sexual behavior
  - - Hormonal regulation (e.g., the release of hormones from the pituitary gland)
- **Basal ganglia:** Harm may result in tremors, atypical postures, and involuntary movements. It also links to movement conditions, such as Parkinson's disease.<sup>22</sup>

Your limbic system controls your emotions, your memories, your hormones, and a lot more. The limbic system is what causes us to have feelings of motivation, the fight, flight, or freeze response, hunger, and the production of hormones that help regulate our autonomic nervous system.

If you let the stress and unhealthy thoughts get the best of you, they will turn into negative emotions,

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<sup>22</sup>Mary West. Medical News Today. The Limbic System and its effect on health. January 9, 2024.

giving the enemy an inroad to continue to attack your mind with more negative thoughts which over time can lead to the tipping point causing limbic system dysfunction.

The battle in your mind is about how you perceive certain things. It's less about the events themselves and more about our perceptions of them. For instance, if someone warns us about a snake on the path ahead, one individual might feel a sense of adventure, eager to discover the type of snake and appreciate God's creation. They proceed cautiously but with anticipation. Conversely, another person, harboring a fear of snakes, may perceive the snake as a looming threat, triggering their fight or flight response. Their heart races and thoughts of encountering snakes flood their mind. Upon returning home safely, they avoid gardening, fearing snake encounters, and suffer nightmares about snakes.

In this scenario, the significance lies in how we perceive and respond to the information about the snake on the trail ahead. If one harbors an unhealthy fear of snakes, it's crucial to rewire their responses and not default to fight or flight mode.

Focusing on the snake and worrying only amplifies our stress response, leading to rumination—a fixation on mental distress and its potential causes and consequences rather than seeking solutions. Therefore, it's not about denying or suppressing emotions but rather about not allowing them to dictate our lives.

Here's another scenario: you leave your house and spot fire trucks with blaring sirens about half a mile away. Immediately, your mind jumps to the

conclusion: "My house is on fire." This thought triggers anxiety, generated by your cortex. While it's logical to consider the possibility of a fire, there are other plausible explanations, such as an accident or a medical emergency unrelated to your home.

However, instead of exploring these alternatives, you fixate on the idea of your house ablaze. Your left hemisphere starts analyzing potential causes of the fire—"Did I leave the stove on? Is the wiring faulty?" Meanwhile, your right hemisphere conjures vivid mental images of your kitchen engulfed in flames. These thoughts and images activate your amygdala, triggering a fear response.

As a result, you may hastily rush home in a panic, despite there being no actual threat to your residence. It's your interpretation of the situation that fuels your anxiety.

On its own, the cortex can't produce an anxiety response; the amygdala and other parts of the brain are needed to accomplish that. People without a functioning amygdala, whether due to stroke, illness, or injury, don't experience fear in the same way most people do. Many of the emotional and physiological aspects of anxiety result only when the cortex activates the amygdala. The amygdala responds to information passed on from the cortex. As discussed earlier, the amygdala almost instantly processes information it receives directly from the senses via the thalamus. After a delay during which the cortex processes and interprets the information, the amygdala also receives information from the cortex.

The first step is to recognize when the cortex is producing thoughts or images that may lead to anxiety. When you become aware of these thoughts and their anxiety-inducing effects, you can begin to recognize the thoughts, identify when they occur, and take steps to change them.

### **Soothing Your Cortex**

Assuming your thoughts and emotions without scrutiny can impede your ability to reprogram your cortex effectively in combating anxiety. The cortex possesses significant flexibility, but it requires your willingness to leverage it. To evaluate your inclination towards cognitive fusion, consider the following statements and mark any that resonate with you.

Let's gauge your propensity for cognitive fusion:

\_\_\_\_\_ If I don't worry, I'm afraid things will get worse.

\_\_\_\_\_ When a thought occurs to me, I find I need to take it seriously.

\_\_\_\_\_ Worrying about something can sometimes prevent bad things from happening.

\_\_\_\_\_ Anxiety is usually a clear sign that something is about to go wrong.

\_\_\_\_\_ When I feel ill, I need to focus on it and evaluate it.

\_\_\_\_\_ I frequently experience a sense of impending doom when faced with uncertainty or change.

\_\_\_\_\_ I'm afraid of some of my thoughts.

\_\_\_\_\_ When I expect to do poorly, it usually means I will do poorly.

\_\_\_\_\_ When someone suggests a different way to see things, I have a hard time taking it seriously.

\_\_\_\_\_ If I have doubts, there are usually good reasons for them.

\_\_\_\_\_ The negative things I think about myself are probably true.

\_\_\_\_\_ I find it challenging to differentiate between my thoughts and reality, often treating my thoughts as if they were facts.

If several of these statements resonate with you, you likely tend to be overly fused with your thoughts and feelings. It's essential to understand that simply experiencing a thought or feeling doesn't validate its truth. When you perceive a thought as being inherently true, you may encounter greater difficulty in releasing it, hindering your ability to rewire your cortex.

### **Being Strong in the Lord**

Isaiah 41:10 says, "So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with My righteous right hand."

The first question to ask is, "What do we need when we face something stronger than us?" When we encounter an adversary—be it an illness, a financial setback, a mental or spiritual assault, or any opposing force that threatens our well-being—what is essential for us? We require the promise of Isaiah 41:10.

Anchor your faith to the promise God made that He is with you and you do not need to be dismayed.

This Hebrew word in Isaiah 41:10 for dismayed is a hidden gem for us. Dismayed means to look at, to gaze, or regard in anxiety.<sup>23</sup> When we have fear, the command is not to gaze or put our focus on what is causing us to fear. Set your gaze on the victory of Jesus Christ. He will strengthen you. He has promised to help you and uphold you, focus on this truth.

The amazing truth of God's Word here in Isaiah 41:10 has come to be known in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), as "reframing" or "cognitive restructuring."

In this practice, individuals are encouraged to reframe their thoughts and perceptions about fear-inducing situations by shifting their focus from the source of fear to more empowering and positive thoughts or beliefs. By redirecting attention away from the fear-provoking stimulus and towards affirmations of strength, support, and resilience (in this case, focusing on the victory of Jesus Christ and the promises of God), individuals can cultivate a more adaptive and constructive mindset. "Look to the LORD and His strength; seek His face always" (1 Chronicles 16:11).

This technique aims to challenge and replace negative or maladaptive thought patterns with more rational, balanced, and affirming perspectives, ultimately reducing anxiety and enhancing emotional well-being.

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<sup>23</sup>[www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h8159/niv/wlc/0-1/](http://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h8159/niv/wlc/0-1/)

## Small Group Questions

### Chapter 2 Unpacking the Science of Neuroplasticity: The Limbic System Explained and how to Calm it

1. How does the concept of neuroplasticity, particularly the brain's ability to rewire itself, challenge our understanding of the mind-body connection and the power of our thoughts and imagination in shaping our experiences and behaviors?

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2. How do you think the integration of Biblical principles and practices, such as mindfulness, gratitude, and contemplative prayer, with modern techniques like progressive muscle relaxation and mindful breathing, contributes to a holistic approach to mental and emotional well-being?

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3. How does worry impact our overall well-being, including our physical, mental, and spiritual health? Consider the interconnectedness between worry and stress, and how it manifests in different areas of our lives.

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4. Reflect on the concept of renewal of the mind as a pathway to healing and overcoming worry. How does integrating spiritual practices, such as communion and meditation on God's Word, contribute to reducing anxiety and promoting holistic well-being?

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5. Reflect on your tendency to accept thoughts and emotions without questioning them. How does this cognitive fusion impact your ability to reprogram your cortex and resist anxiety? Consider how shifting your focus from fear-inducing thoughts to empowering beliefs from God's Word helps reshape your mindset.

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6. Explore the concept of reframing or cognitive restructuring in managing anxiety. How can shifting your focus from fear-provoking stimuli to affirmations of strength and resilience, such as focusing on the promises of God, contribute to reducing anxiety and promoting emotional well-being?

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## Part II: Practical Steps to Renewal



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## **Chapter 3**

### **Identifying Negative Thought Patterns and Triggers**

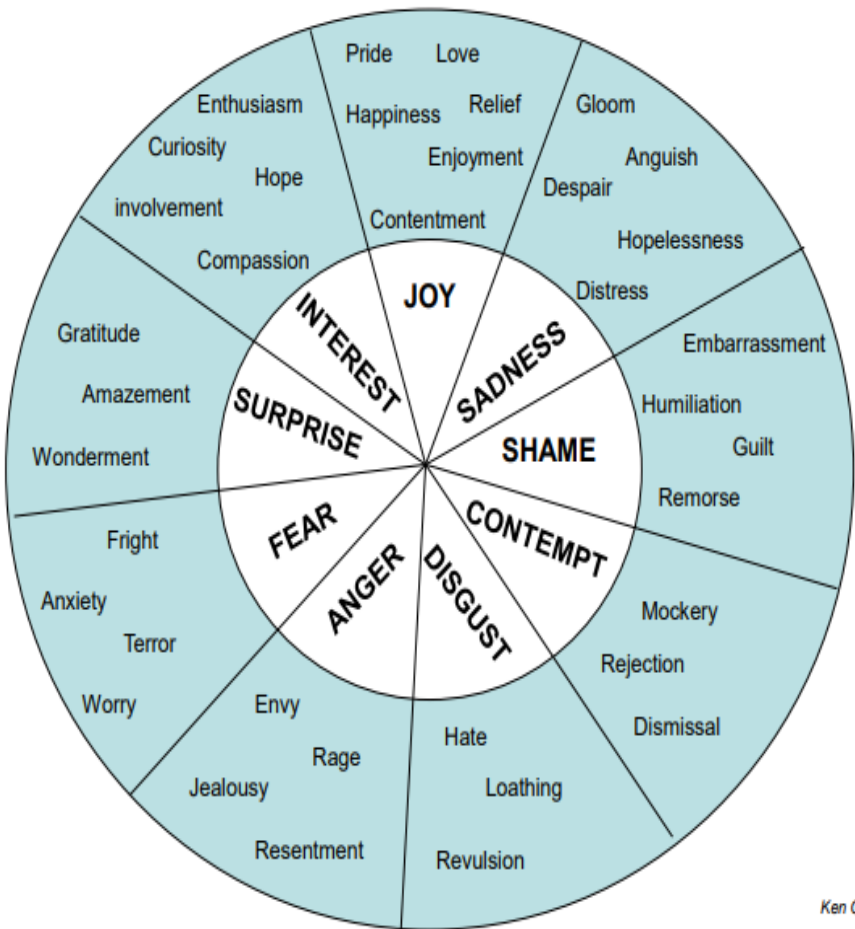


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<sup>25</sup>[www.argyleroadbaptist.files.wordpress.com/2022/09/laurenz-kleinheider-osc8haur0e0-unsplash.jpg](https://www.argyleroadbaptist.files.wordpress.com/2022/09/laurenz-kleinheider-osc8haur0e0-unsplash.jpg)

The accompanying emotion wheel highlights the uplifting emotional realms of joy, surprise, and interest, featuring various specific emotions within each category. Our aim is for our thoughts to resonate within these positive emotional domains. Renewal of our minds moves us out of the negative emotional categories encompassing sadness, shame, contempt, disgust, anger, and fear.



26 **Wheel Of Emotions**

<sup>26</sup>Ken Gordon. Wheel of Emotions. 2002.

## **F.A.C.E.: Overcoming Avoidance-Overcome your Anxiety**

Learning to F.A.C.E. the situations you normally avoid will lead you to overcome your anxiety.



**F**ind and identify your target – What is it that you would like to be able to face, rather than avoid?

You could write a list of several targets to face, then choose one that is not too distressing. You

can gradually work through the list, from least distressing to most distressing.

**A**ction – Decide on the steps you need to take. Break it down into manageable chunks, like steps on a step ladder leading up to the top or a big one. Take one step at a time, starting at the bottom.

**C**oping – Identify and use your coping strategies. Write down all your coping strategies and use those that are going to be most useful for that situation.

**E**valuate – How did it go? After you've actioned the steps, review how things went. What went well? What didn't go so well?<sup>27</sup>



<sup>27</sup>Carol Vivyan.[www.get.gg/face.htm](http://www.get.gg/face.htm). 2016.

## **Overcoming Avoidance By Facing Your Fears Worksheet**

We often steer clear of situations, individuals, locations, or even thoughts that might trigger distress in us. While this avoidance can provide temporary relief, it ultimately perpetuates the issue over time. Moreover, avoidance significantly disrupts our daily functioning. To effectively address our challenges, we must confront and overcome this tendency to avoid them.

Write down things that you try to avoid. Once you have your list, write a number from 0-10 alongside each item, according to how distressing that item is (10 is most feared or distressing, and 0 is least feared or distressing).

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In starting to overcome avoidance, take the least feared or distressing items on your list and think

about how you can start to face this trigger. You might want to break it down into smaller steps. Write down what you need to do, including any steps.

Feared situation:

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Steps to face feared situation:

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Coping strategies I can use:

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Do the same process for each item on the list, repeating each step frequently, staying in the situation



despite the anxiety (use your coping strategies to help you). Gradually and slowly work your way up from the least feared to the most feared situation.<sup>28</sup>

Behaviors might include:

- Avoiding people or places
- Not leaving the house
- Going to certain places at only certain times, an example would be shopping at smaller shops, at less busy times
- Only going with someone else

Go to the feared situation, by using coping behaviors to get you through:

- Self-talk
- Holding a drink
- Fiddling with something in your hand such as clothes, or jewelry.
- Have an escape plan (watching the clock for how long until you can exit).
- Bringing medications/supplements with you
- Pacing
- Distracting yourself with your phone

These are called "safety behaviors". Safety behaviors can also help to keep your anxiety going. While you depend on safety behaviors to help you cope, you

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<sup>28</sup>Ken Gordon. Wheel of Emotions. 2002.

don't get to find out that without them, the anxiety would reduce and go away on its own. While avoiding people or situations might help you feel better at that time, it doesn't make your anxiety any better over a longer period. If you're frightened that your anxiety will make you pass out or vomit in the supermarket aisle, you won't find out that won't happen, because you don't go. So, the belief that it will happen remains, along with the anxiety.

Once you are successful in facing the things you fear try to face them again this time reducing the number of coping behaviors you used before. Over time you should be able to face everything that you have written on your list.

### **Vicious Cycles of Anxiety:**

Main Idea: Our thoughts lead to feelings that impact our behaviors.

Thought: Something bad will happen and I won't be able to cope.

Feelings: Anxious. Adrenaline is coursing through our body. Our heart is racing and we feel tense. We are breathing fast and we feel shaky, light-headed and we are sweaty.

Behaviors: Avoid or Escape. We don't go out or we make excuses to leave early. Safety behaviors help us cope with the situation but we aren't fully present and we don't get to enjoy what we are taking part in.

## **Negative Thoughts Lead to Actions**

Situation 1:

You are asked to go to a party.

Altered Thinking:

"It will be terrible. I won't have anything to say."

Unhelpful thinking style:

Jumping to the worst conclusion.

Altered emotions and physical symptoms:

Anxiety, physical symptoms of arousal.

Altered behavior:

You don't go.

Situation 2:

When conversing with someone, you find yourself preoccupied with concerns about their perception of you.

Altered Thinking:

"They dislike me and think that I am an idiot."

Unhelpful thinking style:

Mind reading and second-guessing how others see you.

Altered emotions and physical symptoms:

Anxiety, and physical symptoms, including feeling hot and sweaty.

Altered behavior:

You avoid eye contact as you talk and bring the conversation to an abrupt end. You avoid speaking to them again and isolate yourself.

We all feel anxious some times. A certain amount of anxiety helps us to be more alert and focused. For example, before an exam, a few exam nerves have a positive effect - motivating us, helping us focus our thoughts on the job at hand, making us more alert. Too much anxiety, or constantly being anxious, is unhealthy and detrimental to our lives and relationships.

A life-changing shift happens when we stop putting our focus on getting out of the trial we are in and instead focus on Jesus who is with us in the trial, and what He is leading us to do during it.

### **Peter Walks on Water**

"Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to You on the water."

"Come," He said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" Immediately Jesus reached out His hand and caught him. "You of little faith," He said, "why did you doubt?" And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down" (Matthew 14:28-32).

In this moment in history Peter is headed straight toward Jesus, walking on water! Peter's eyes are fixed on Jesus and trouble only comes for him when "he saw the wind". The truth is that you can't see the wind. You can only see the effect of the wind, the waves moving. As long as Peter fixed His eyes on Jesus, Peter was able to do what he saw the Lord doing.

In the same way, when the strong winds of painful symptoms clamor for your attention, remember that receiving your healing has nothing to do with how bad your symptoms are (how high the waves are). It has everything to do with how Christ has already paid the price for your healing and health. It has everything to do with how Jesus is above every symptom that can plague your body. Fix your gaze upon Jesus and stride forward in His strength, healing, and vitality. Keep your focus on Him as you step into the boundless provision He offers to you.

Don't let the stormy winds and waves of your challenges distract you. They have nothing to do with whether you walk victoriously over your circumstances or not. Keep your eyes on Jesus, renew your mind, and receive your miracle.

### **Recognizing Your Triggers**

While it is important for us to recognize our negative thought patterns and renew our minds (change our thinking for the better) it's equally important to pinpoint the triggers that initiate these patterns. Understanding our triggers enables us to break free from recurring cycles of negativity. Wouldn't it be much better to have less negative thinking that needs the renewal of our minds? This is the process of maturing in our faith. The more our minds are renewed the less destructive negative thinking will impact our lives.

What is a trigger? A trigger is an anxiety-provoking stimulus, such as a sensation, object, or event, that was originally neutral, meaning it wouldn't cause fear or anxiety for most people. Originally, it wasn't associated with any emotional memories, positive or negative, and therefore didn't cause any reaction.

Typically, hearing a car horn doesn't elicit a strong panic response. However, for someone to develop such a reaction, it must be linked to a highly negative event, like a car accident. In this scenario, the association between the sound of a horn and the trauma of an automobile collision leads the lateral amygdala to form a memory. Consequently, whenever the amygdala hears a car horn, it triggers a fear reaction. It's essential to understand that the horn itself didn't cause the accident; it's merely associated with it. The amygdala operates based on associations rather than direct cause and effect. Triggers can encompass various sensory stimuli, including sights, smells, sounds, or situations.

Pause and reflect on the array of circumstances that evoke feelings of anxiety within you. Initially, delving into these diverse situations might seem daunting, but persist, for within this multitude of anxiety-inducing scenarios lies a discernible pattern. Although it may appear overwhelming to dissect numerous scenarios, you'll probably discover that a lesser number of common triggers lie hidden within this wide variety of situations. For instance, while you may encounter various anxiety triggers at work, closer examination may reveal recurring factors, such as interactions with your boss, heightened voices, or speaking engagements. To best identify your triggers, including those that are common to several situations, try to consider as many situations as possible in which you feel troublesome anxiety. Additionally, don't overlook internal sensations that may contribute to your anxiety response. Whether it's a racing heart, dizziness, or the urge to use the restroom, recognize

these internal cues as potential triggers, as they can also fuel feelings of anxiety.

What or when are the times when you are more likely to get anxious? If you can see the patterns, then maybe you can do something about those situations, and do something different.

- Certain places? • Certain people? • Any time, any place? • Did you see certain things? • Did you hear certain things?

### **Discovering your triggers Using A.B.C.D.E. Method**

#### **A) Activating Event:**

What, where, when, who with? Outside event or internal trigger, real or imagined? What was it that I reacted to? What disturbed me? What pressed my buttons?

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#### **B) Believable Thoughts:**

What went through my mind at that time? What did I think or imagine?

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**C) Consequences of believing that thought:**

Pick the most dominate thought. What was my response to this thought?

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How am I likely to react (behave and feel) if I do not believe the thought?

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## **D) Defuse**

Defusion involves seeing thoughts and feelings for what they are (streams of words, passing sensations), not what they say they are (dangers or facts).

What defusion technique could I use?

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Examples of Defusion Techniques:

- Notice unhelpful thoughts.

Notice what's happening – your thoughts, physical sensations, emotions, images, memories. Notice the way you're interpreting what they mean, and how that's affecting you. What am I reacting to? Perhaps say the thoughts very slowly, or very quickly, in a squeaky or comedic voice, or write them down.

- Label unhelpful thoughts and emotions: a judgment, a prediction, a feeling, a sensation, a memory, etc...
- Practice mindfulness so that you can better notice when you are in the present moment versus when you are stuck in your head in the past or future.
- Use metaphors to help get a different view of your thoughts, feelings, and self-evaluations.

In the defusion technique, utilizing metaphors can be a powerful way to gain a different perspective on your thoughts, feelings, and self-evaluations. Here's how you can use metaphors effectively

1. Visual Imagery: Visualize your thoughts or feelings as objects, creatures, or landscapes. For example, if you're struggling with self-doubt, you might imagine it as a heavy stone weighing you down. Roll the heavy stone down the hill, letting it go.

2. Symbolism: Assign symbolic meaning to your thoughts or feelings. For instance, if you're grappling with anxiety, you might liken it to a storm passing through, recognizing that storms eventually dissipate.

By incorporating metaphors into your defusion practice, you can create distance from your thoughts and emotions, allowing for greater clarity and flexibility in how you relate to them.

- Stop, step back. Observe what you are feeling and thinking; how the other person is acting.

**E) Effective New Belief and Consequence:** What is a different way to now look at the situation? How did your feelings change after you looked at the situation differently?

### **Doing Things Differently**

If avoidance and reliance on safety behaviors perpetuate our anxiety in the long run, then it stands to reason that confronting it may initially be uncomfortable but ultimately empowers us to regain control and experience improvement over time. Develop a plan to gradually confront the activities you typically avoid. For example, if you usually shy away from large social gatherings at work, consider starting with a smaller dinner at a familiar restaurant with a few close colleagues, rather than diving straight into the annual Christmas party. Despite the discomfort initially, you'll discover that you can derive enjoyment from such events and that the anxious feelings do dissipate. Similarly, if you rely on safety behaviors, prioritize them and begin by eliminating or reducing the least important ones, gradually working your way up over time. This incremental approach can lead to significant progress in managing anxiety.

Remember these promises from God's Word:

"You, God, will keep in perfect peace all those who trust in You, all whose thoughts are fixed on You" (Isaiah 26:3).

"Peace I leave with you; My peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid" (John 14:27).

## Rumination Compared to Worry

### Worry

Worry is always future-focused – worry focuses on danger and our inability to cope.

Worrying leads to anxiety, stress, and fear.

Worry asks the question, “What if?”

Worry imagines the worst will happen.

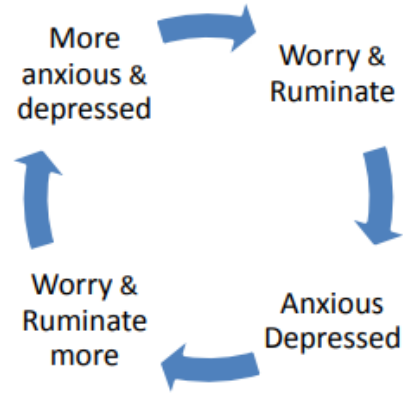
### Rumination

Rumination is always past-focused- loss and personal failings.

Rumination leads to depression, sadness, and shame.

Rumination dwells on “If only...”.

Rumination causes regret. I should have \_\_\_\_\_ or I shouldn’t have \_\_\_\_\_.



Worry is the process of envisioning negative outcomes for a situation. Rumination is a style of thinking that involves repetitively mulling over problems, relationships, or possible conflicts. Rumination has been shown to lead to depression. In rumination, there’s an intense focus on the details and possible causes or effects of situations. While individuals may perceive that engaging in thinking processes such as worrying or ruminating will ultimately lead to finding a solution, the reality is that these activities tend to reinforce the neural pathways in the cortex responsible for generating feelings of anxiety. When you visually imagine something frightening, you use your right hemisphere to do so.

How does it affect us?

- In ruminating and worrying, we're trying to reduce the distress and overcome problems, but we end up increasing and prolonging our distress and making the problem bigger.
- Interferes with clear thinking, daily activity, and our ability to cope.
- Often leads to unhelpful behaviors to help us escape from our thoughts (self-harm, drinking, drugs, comfort eating, etc).
- The more we ruminate or worry, the stronger the habit becomes, and the harder it is to change. The less we ruminate or worry, the weaker the habit becomes.

What can I do?

- Notice that the mind is going down that rumination/worry route.

Tell yourself:

- I don't have to think about that right now. It can wait until I feel stronger and can think positively.
- I can change my thoughts – and I can also choose not to focus on negative ones.
- Do something that will take up your attention and help you feel better such as exercise, reading, or completing a task to bring about positive emotions.
- Ask yourself, "What can I do right now, that will help me feel better, and be effective for this situation?"
- Right now, what can I do that will take me one step in the right direction?<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Carol Vivyan. [www.getselfhelp.co.uk](http://www.getselfhelp.co.uk). 2010.

Your brain is susceptible to believing whatever you feed it. My journey with running was marked by numerous highs and lows as I progressed. I was once an avid runner, achieving success as part of the winning team in the inaugural Detroit Marathon relay. However, my health deteriorated to the point where running seemed impossible. I doubted I would ever lace up my running shoes again. Even as I tentatively started running once more, the mere thought of completing a mile felt daunting. Yet, in my mind, I began to shift my perspective. I envisioned myself as a resilient runner, finding solace in moments of spiritual reflection during my runs. For instance, as I reached certain time markers in the race I thanked God for those special moments in my life. Think about what time you were born and thank God for always being with you when you hit that same time running. For me, I was born at 6:17 so six minutes and seventeen seconds into my run I thank God for being with me in my life's journey. What is your anniversary date or other significant times in your life? However long it takes to run your race, load up on markers to celebrate the blessings God has given you. Each milestone is an opportunity to offer gratitude and praise. Through shifting my mindset, I rediscovered the joy of running. I realized that I am not weak; because I draw strength from God as I rejoiced all along the way. For me, running served as a tangible manifestation of how changing our thoughts and beliefs can yield results in the journey of life's race.

### **Evaluating Your Propensity for Catastrophizing**

Catastrophizing refers to the inclination to perceive minor problems or small setbacks as significant disasters. If you believe that one specific thing going wrong will ruin your entire day, you're likely

catastrophizing. This cognitive interpretation rooted in the cortex can lead to heightened anxiety, but by learning to identify it, you can take measures to mitigate its impact. This evaluation aims to assist you in discerning whether catastrophizing might contribute to your anxiety. Please review the statements below and mark any that resonate with you:

\_\_\_\_\_ I often imagine the worst when I'm thinking about how some situation might turn out.

\_\_\_\_\_ I often feel as if I can't handle one more thing going wrong.

\_\_\_\_\_ I can make a mountain out of a molehill.

\_\_\_\_\_ I overreact to problems that others wouldn't consider so much of a concern.

\_\_\_\_\_ Sometimes what begins as a small doubt in my mind becomes an overwhelming negative thought as I dwell on it.

\_\_\_\_\_ Even a small setback, like being stopped by a traffic light, can infuriate me.

\_\_\_\_\_ People would think I'm going crazy if they knew the awful thoughts that go through my mind.

\_\_\_\_\_ When something doesn't turn out the way that I want it to, I find it difficult to cope.

If many of these statements resonate with you, you tend to catastrophize.

Use metaphors to try to see things differently. For example: Visualize a tunnel and the importance of pressing through until you reach the end. When anxiety grips us as we navigate through it, the optimal choice is to continue forward rather than seek escape. Remember, this sensation will fade – there is an end to this tunnel.

See a majestic tall mountain in your mind. Whatever the weather, or whatever happens on the surface of the mountain – the mountain stands firm, strong, grounded, and permanent. We can be like that mountain, observing thoughts, feelings, and sensations, knowing inner stillness. Our faith is anchored to the Rock, Jesus Christ. “We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure” (Hebrews 6:19a). Inner stillness comes with trusting God and knowing Him. “Be still and know that I am the Lord” (Psalm 46:10).

### **What to Do When Asked About Your Health**

When a friend asks about your well-being, rather than dwelling on the negatives, simply mention that you’re facing a health challenge and then shift the conversation to the positives of your day. Share moments of joy, like taking a walk or spending time with your children after school. Remember, your brain absorbs everything you say, so it’s crucial to avoid continually reinforcing the idea of being unwell. Instead, focus on the belief that God’s power surpasses your challenges, offering healing through faith in Christ. Trust that He is working miracles in your life, even in this trial, and concentrate on reshaping your mindset according to His plan.

During your recovery, you may tend to avoid discussing symptoms but inadvertently dwell on other



negative aspects of life, like relationship or financial issues. It is vital to redirect such conversations. If someone steers toward negativity, gracefully shift the focus or offer to pray for them. If negativity persists, politely conclude the conversation and prioritize uplifting your mood.

Engage in activities that bring joy and stimulate your brain, such as solving puzzles or playing games. I found solace in accomplishing simple tasks during my recovery, like doing the dishes, which boosted my mood. Turn to prayer, or Scripture, or reflect on daily blessings when feeling low. Plan mood-boosting activities for each day of the week to bring excitement and positivity into your life.

After absorbing insights from the impactful book “Make Your Bed: Little Things That Can Change Your Life...And Maybe the World”,<sup>30</sup> I learned the profound significance of starting the day with a simple act like making your bed. This minor task sets a positive tone for the day ahead. Accomplishing it fosters a sense of achievement, boosting morale and motivation to tackle more tasks. Even if the day takes a downturn, returning home to find a neatly made bed instills satisfaction and readiness for tomorrow, nurturing a positive outlook moving forward.

As Jennifer stood before her class to deliver her speech on environmental conservation, she noticed her heart pounding and her breathing rate increasing. While these symptoms are designed to aid in fight-or-flight situations, they don't indicate genuine danger in

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<sup>30</sup>Admiral William H. McRaven. Make Your Bed: Little Things That Can Change Your Life...And Maybe the World. Grand Central Publishing. April 4, 2017.

the context of public speaking. These reactions are triggered by the amygdala, which often reacts unnecessarily. Jennifer needs to recognize that this isn't a threatening situation and that her amygdala is sounding a false alarm. By retraining her amygdala and not reinforcing fearful or anxious reactions, Jennifer can mitigate these responses. It's crucial not to inadvertently strengthen the protective amygdala reaction by assuming that such emotional responses equate to genuine danger. You don't want to let your cortex strengthen the reaction.

Trying to use your cortex to convince yourself that the situation isn't truly dangerous won't always shut off the amygdala's response. A more effective approach is using deep breathing techniques and strategies that retrain the amygdala.

### **Practice Slow, Deep Breathing**

Practice it now, taking a few deep breaths. Don't force your breathing; rather, breathe gently both in and out. It doesn't matter whether you breathe through your mouth or nose—just breathe comfortably. Note how this deliberate slowing and deepening of your breathing affects you. Does it have a calming effect? Not everyone finds slow, deep breathing to be calming. Increased attention to breathing can increase anxiety in some people, especially those with asthma or other breathing difficulties. In such cases, people may get greater benefits from relaxation strategies that focus on reducing muscle tension or that use music or movement. That said, most people are surprised at how effective simple breathing exercises can be in reducing anxiety and increasing calmness almost immediately. Many students find this approach

helpful before and during exams. Nervous drivers use it while on the road, and claustrophobic people often find it helpful when they're in an enclosed space. Plus, the breath is readily available in all situations. You can practice slow, deep breathing almost anytime and anywhere, and it's completely free! When people are anxious, they're likely to breathe quickly and shallowly. They may not get enough oxygen, which produces an uncomfortable sensation.

Hyperventilation can also result, due to expelling carbon dioxide too quickly, resulting in low levels of carbon dioxide in the blood. This can cause dizziness, belching, a feeling of unreality or confusion, or feelings of tingling in the hands, feet, or face.

Hyperventilation disrupts the balance between oxygen and carbon dioxide in the body, and the amygdala detects this instantly. Correcting this imbalance using deliberate breathing techniques sends a signal to the amygdala to relax. Consider Lila, who thought her feelings of dizziness and tingling were just part of her anxiety. When she learned that she was experiencing the results of hyperventilation, she found that she could reduce those symptoms by simply attending to her breath. People who are hyperventilating are often instructed to practice diaphragmatic breathing.

### **Diaphragmatic Breathing**

To practice diaphragmatic breathing, sit comfortably and place one hand on your chest and the other on your stomach. Take a deep breath and see which part of your body expands. Effective diaphragmatic breathing will cause your stomach to expand as you inhale and retract as you exhale. Your chest shouldn't move much at all. Try to focus on breathing deeply in

a manner that expands your stomach as you fill your lungs with air. Many people tend to pull their stomachs in as they inhale, which keeps the diaphragm from expanding downward effectively.

### **Amygdala Based Anxiety**

Amygdala-based anxiety is due to associations, not logic, so triggers will not make any logical sense. Griffin was excited to give some balloons to his grandson Max who was running happily toward him. On his way, Max tripped on the driveway hitting his face on the concrete, knocking a tooth out and causing his mouth to fill with blood. Now Max experiences amygdala-based anxiety whenever he sees balloons. The once harmless balloons became a trigger for his fear because they were associated with the pain of his injury.

Many people who struggle with anxiety misinterpret these reactions as an indication that something negative is happening or going to happen. When they feel their heart pound, they might mistakenly believe that they're having a heart attack. Alternatively, they may be convinced that these sensations indicate that danger is imminent. But in reality, the symptoms they're experiencing are completely normal and simply mean the amygdala has been activated. The stress response is essential in preparing us to respond immediately to emergencies. Unfortunately, it isn't always useful in responding to the threats we face today. Increased heart rate, perspiration, and blood flow to your extremities aren't particularly useful when your boss tells you to increase productivity or face termination. They won't be helpful if you receive an

overdue notice on your mortgage payment or your teenage daughter or son starts arguing with you. But these physiological reactions are hardwired into you, and once the central nucleus activates them, you'll have to contend with them.

The central nucleus of the amygdala functions like an ignition switch. When this small part of the amygdala receives a danger signal from the lateral nucleus, it triggers the stress response by sending messages to various other regions of the brain, making the amygdala a key player in brain processes. One of its most significant connections is with the hypothalamus, a peanut-sized area that regulates several bodily functions, including metabolism, hunger, and sleep. Through its link to the hypothalamus, the central nucleus can prompt the release of adrenaline, which increases heart rate and blood pressure, and cortisol, which releases glucose into the bloodstream for quick energy. It also activates the sympathetic nervous system, enabling rapid changes in physiological systems so we can react swiftly, often without conscious awareness. The brain is structured in such a way that processing within the amygdala pathway occurs in mere milliseconds.<sup>31</sup>

You can form new connections in the amygdala that compete with those linked to fear and anxiety. To encourage the amygdala to create these connections, it's important to expose it to situations that challenge the association between a trigger and a negative

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<sup>31</sup>Catherine M. Pittman, PhD, Elizabeth M Karle, MLIS. *Rewire Your Anxious Brain: How to Use the Neuroscience of Fear to End Anxiety, Panic, and Worry*. New Harbinger Publications, Inc. P.85. 2015.

event. By presenting new, contradictory information, the amygdala can adapt and learn from these experiences. With repeated practice along this new neural pathway, you establish an alternative route that helps you avoid anxiety. This way, fear and anxiety are no longer your only responses; you can develop calmer reactions instead. Through exposure techniques, you can convey new information to the lateral nucleus, effectively rewiring the pathways connected to specific triggers.<sup>32</sup>

### **Exposure-Based Treatment**

During each exposure, anxiety typically rises, often to an uncomfortable level, and then begins to subside. The crucial aspect is allowing the anxiety response to run its course, peaking and then diminishing, without seeking escape. This process enables the amygdala to associate previously feared situations with safety. Systematic desensitization involves acquiring relaxation techniques and gradually confronting feared objects or situations. This typically unfolds through a slow but steady progression, systematically addressing situations that evoke increasingly higher levels of anxiety as therapy advances. Conversely, flooding involves immediate exposure to the most fear-provoking situation, often lasting for extended periods. While more intense, flooding offers quicker relief from anxiety.

Consider a man with a fear of flying who receives an airline ticket to visit his friend. As he faces the

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<sup>32</sup>Catherine M. Pittman, PhD, Elizabeth M Karle, MLIS. *Rewire Your Anxious Brain: How to Use the Neuroscience of Fear to End Anxiety, Panic, and Worry*. New Harbinger Publications, Inc. Pages.124-125. 2015.

prospect of packing or boarding the plane, his anxiety heightens, presenting prime opportunities for exposure. However, he may instinctively seek to avoid the trip, missing the chance to rewire his amygdala's response to flying. Although he might understand the logical safety of flying over driving, his amygdala operates independently of reason, triggering stress responses based on established connections. Despite the discomfort, escaping feared situations undermines the potential for exposure and the opportunity to spend time with his friend.

Exposure operates on the principle of "no pain, no gain." To modify your response, confronting feared situations and allowing yourself to experience anxiety are essential. Similar to muscle fibers, the amygdala learns best through stimulation, with repeated exposures reinforcing your response. Therefore, exposure functions as a regimen of exercises to train your amygdala.

Employ exposure techniques selectively, focusing on situations relevant to your life. Avoid subjecting yourself to exposure exercises if altering your fear response is unnecessary. For example, if you don't need to overcome a fear of snakes, there's no need to address it.

"If you're on antianxiety medication, be aware that some medications can assist you in the exposure process, whereas others make it harder for your amygdala to learn. Benzodiazepines, such as Valium (diazepam), Xanax (alprazolam), Ativan (lorazepam), and Klonopin (clonazepam), may interfere with

exposure. These drugs have a tranquilizing effect on the amygdala, which helps keep anxiety in check. However, the process of rewiring is based on activating the amygdala and creating anxiety to generate new learning. New learning is less likely to occur in a brain medicated with benzodiazepines. Research has shown that taking benzodiazepines decreases the effectiveness of exposure-based treatment.”<sup>33</sup>

“On the other hand, certain medications assist with the process of exposure, including selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) and serotonin-norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors (SNRIs). The SSRIs include medications such as Zoloft (sertraline), Prozac (fluoxetine), Celexa (citalopram), Lexapro (escitalopram), and Paxil (paroxetine). SNRIs include medications such as Effexor (venlafaxine), Pristiq (desvenlafaxine), and Cymbalta (duloxetine). Research indicates that SSRIs and SNRIs promote growth and change in neurons (Molendijk et al. 2011). Therefore, these medications may make it more likely that brain circuitry can be modified by experience.”<sup>34</sup>

### **Moses Faces His Fear**

Moses, a major figure in the Bible, confronted his fears by returning to the place he had fled from. His apprehension about going back to Egypt was rooted in

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<sup>33</sup>Addis, M. E., C. Hatgis, E. Cardemile, K. Jacob, A. D. Krasnow, and A. Mansfield. 2006. “Effectiveness of Cognitive-Behavioral Treatment for Panic Disorder Versus Treatment as Usual in a Managed Care Setting: 2-Year Follow-Up.” *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 74:377–385.

<sup>34</sup>Catherine M. Pittman, PhD, Elizabeth M Karle, MLIS. *Rewire Your Anxious Brain: How to Use the Neuroscience of Fear to End Anxiety, Panic, and Worry*. New Harbinger Publications, Inc. P.134. 2015.



his past experiences and the risks associated with confronting Pharaoh.

**Past Trauma:** Moses fled Egypt after he killed an Egyptian overseer who was mistreating a Hebrew slave (Exodus 2:11-15). This act led to Moses becoming a fugitive from the Egyptian authorities. Although many years had passed, Moses may have still harbored fear and guilt over his past actions and the consequences they brought.

**Threat of Death:** Moses knew that returning to Egypt meant confronting Pharaoh, the most powerful ruler in the land. Given his previous status as a member of Pharaoh's household and his subsequent flight from Egypt, Moses likely feared retaliation or even death if he were to appear before Pharaoh again. The Pharaoh who reigned during Moses' exile had died (Exodus 2:23-25), but the new Pharaoh would still pose a significant threat to Moses' safety.

Moses felt uncertain about his ability to fulfill the task God had given him. Leading the Israelites out of Egypt was an immense responsibility and challenge. When God appeared to Moses in the form of a burning bush and commissioned him to return to Egypt, Moses initially resisted, expressing his fear and inadequacy for the task (Exodus 3:11). Moses' reluctance to accept this divine calling underscores his apprehension and reluctance to face the daunting challenges that awaited him in Egypt.

Despite his initial fear and hesitation, Moses ultimately overcame his doubts and fears and obeyed God's command, trusting in God's guidance and provision throughout the journey. His story serves as a powerful

example of overcoming fear and stepping out in faith to fulfill a divine purpose through facing our fears and trusting God.

Your experiences during exposures must be neutral or positive. Remember, courage is not the absence of fear; courage is acting despite fear. The more you experience anxiety and stay in the situation long enough for your fear to diminish, the stronger the new circuitry will become.

### **Creating a Hierarchy for Exposure**

Amanda has a fear of grocery shopping. Amanda writes down ten experiences she would have while shopping that would provoke anxiety at various levels. Her list might look something like this:

1. Crowded aisles
2. Feeling nauseous and having to use the bathroom while in a long checkout line
3. Interactions with unfamiliar people
4. Difficulty finding items on her list
5. Loud noises or chaotic atmosphere
6. Fear of making mistakes while selecting items
7. Feeling overwhelmed by choices
8. Concerns about judgment from others
9. Fear of having a panic attack in public
10. Feeling rushed or pressured to finish quickly

Next, we ask her to rank these behaviors from least to most anxiety-provoking. A scale of level of anxiety ranging from 1 to 100 is useful. It's important to monitor your cortex for thoughts that may increase your fear. The cortex is capable of making the situation worse by thinking negative thoughts. When

you detect self-defeating or anxiety-provoking thoughts, try to substitute helpful coping thoughts.

### **Coping Thoughts**

Coping thoughts are thoughts or statements that are likely to have positive effects on your emotional state. One way of evaluating the usefulness of thoughts is to look at the effects they have on you. In this light, you can see the value of coping thoughts, which are more likely to result in calm responding and an increased ability to cope with difficult situations.

Examples of some healthy coping thoughts to use:

1. "I am capable of handling this situation."
2. "This feeling is temporary, and it will pass."
3. "The Lord has helped me overcome challenges like this before, and He will do it again."
4. "As Christ is so am I in this world" (1 John 4:17).
5. "God loves me and His love for me will drive out my fear" (1 John 4:18).
6. "I will learn from this experience and grow stronger as a result."
7. "I refuse to let fear dictate my actions; I will take this one step at a time."
8. "My exposure to this fearful situation will make it easier to face each time."
9. "As I take this deep breath I will allow myself to relax because I know that God is with me."

10. "What blessings have I experienced already today?"

When practicing exposure don't use safety-seeking techniques as it will limit the effectiveness of exposure.

**Identifying Amygdala Emotions in Your Life**

Can you think of harmless situations or objects that elicit amygdala-based anxiety as a result of the association-based language of your amygdala? List examples of both positive and negative reactions.

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Remember, the items you list for either category need not make logical sense. For example, you may have a negative emotional reaction to the scent of lilacs and a positive emotional reaction to lightning storms. Reducing or eliminating fear or panic attacks requires retraining the amygdala. It isn't necessary to know the original cause of amygdala-based anxiety to change the emotional circuitry.

Many cortex-based anxiety symptoms do respond to logical arguments, but when it comes to amygdala-based anxiety, there's only one sure way for the amygdala to learn: experience. Experience is most effective when the person interacts directly with the object or situation, although observing another person has also been shown to affect the amygdala (Olsson, Nearing, and Phelps 2007).<sup>35</sup>

You can reason with the amygdala for hours, but if you're trying to change amygdala-based anxiety, that tactic won't be as effective as a few minutes of direct experience will be, "activate to generate". Well-meaning family members and friends, and sometimes even people struggling with anxiety, often think logic and reason should change the way the anxious person reacts. But, of course, the amygdala isn't logical.

### **Diagnosing Panic Attacks**

People experiencing a panic attack may feel the desire to attack someone (fight), an overwhelming urge to flee (flight), or an inability to take any action (freeze). Other possible symptoms include sympathetic nervous system reactions such as light-headedness, nausea, numbness or tingling, tightness in the chest, a sensation of being smothered, difficulty swallowing, or hot flashes or chills. In addition, the pupils dilate, making the world seem unnaturally bright, and time may seem to pass more slowly. Few experiences in life are as unpleasant and overwhelming as a panic attack. Indeed, panic attacks are so distressing that

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<sup>35</sup>Olsson, A., K. I. Nearing, and E. A. Phelps. 2007. "Learning Fears by Observing Others: The Neural Systems of Social Fear Transmission." *Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience* 2:3–11.

some people fear that they're losing control, going crazy, or about to die. Symptoms usually last from one to thirty minutes but can return in waves and are not only frightening but also quite exhausting.

Self-diagnosing a panic attack can be challenging, especially if you're experiencing intense symptoms and are unsure about their cause. However, there are some common signs and symptoms associated with panic attacks that you can look out for:

1. Sudden onset of intense fear or discomfort: Panic attacks often come on suddenly and without warning. You may feel an overwhelming sense of fear, dread, or impending doom.
2. Physical symptoms: Panic attacks typically involve a combination of physical symptoms, which may include rapid heartbeat (palpitations), chest pain or discomfort, sweating, trembling or shaking, shortness of breath or a feeling of being smothered, dizziness or lightheadedness, nausea or abdominal discomfort, tingling or numbness in the hands or feet, and hot or cold flashes.
3. Feeling out of control: During a panic attack, you may feel like you're losing control or going crazy. You might fear that you're having a heart attack, going to die, or completely lose control of yourself.
4. Sense of detachment: Some people experience feelings of detachment from reality during a panic attack, as if they're watching themselves from outside their body (depersonalization) or feeling like things around them aren't real (derealization).

5. Duration: Panic attacks typically peak within a few minutes and then gradually subside. However, they can last longer in some cases, especially if triggered by a particularly stressful situation.

6. Fear of future attacks: After experiencing a panic attack, many people develop a fear of having another one, which can lead to anticipatory anxiety and avoidance behaviors.

If you're experiencing these symptoms and suspect you may be having a panic attack, it's important to seek help from a healthcare professional for a proper diagnosis and treatment. Panic attacks can be distressing and disruptive to daily life, but they are treatable with various therapies and medications. Additionally, ruling out other medical conditions that may mimic the symptoms of a panic attack is essential for accurate diagnosis and appropriate management.



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### **Trials Signal It's Time to Renew Your Mind**

Trials serve as poignant signals urging us to embark on the transformative journey of renewing our minds.

In the face of adversity, we are compelled to reassess our perspectives, beliefs, and responses to challenges. Rather than viewing trials as mere obstacles, we can perceive them as opportunities for growth and refinement. By renewing our minds, we cultivate resilience, wisdom, and a deeper understanding of ourselves and our faith. Through introspection, prayer, and diligent study, we realign our thoughts with the timeless truths found in Scripture, drawing strength from the examples of perseverance set by those who have walked before us. Thus, trials become catalysts for spiritual renewal, propelling us toward greater clarity, purpose, and unwavering trust in the divine guidance that accompanies us on our journey.

The problem for us occurs when we put our total focus on getting out of the trial instead of focusing on the surpassing victory we have in Christ through the trials (Romans 8:37). This cycle will continue lasting months, years, and even decades, until we break it by renewing our minds. Just because our brains respond to certain triggers, it does not mean you can't change those thought patterns and responses, and your emotions and your actions for the better. We have the power to form new associations with our triggers rendering them powerless to flood our bodies with anxiety and stress hormones. Whenever we have unhealthy negative thoughts our body receives a signal that we are stressed, and as a result, stress hormones are released.

Here are the various stress hormones that are released:

- Cortisol is the main human stress hormone that affects the physical and mental state of the mind and body



- Glucagon, a hormone that raises blood sugar levels
- Prolactin, a hormone that regulates lactation and reproductive functions
- Catecholamines, such as adrenaline and norepinephrine, increase heart rate, blood pressure, and blood sugar levels
- Sex hormones, such as estrogens, progesterone, and testosterone, are affected by states of stress<sup>37</sup>

If you let the stress and unhealthy thoughts get the best of you, they will turn into negative emotions. It's all about how you perceive certain things. Two different people can receive the news that there is a snake in the path ahead an example used earlier. One person could return home afraid of encountering the snake and choose to miss out on gardening with her daughter because of the chance of encountering a snake. The other person is eager to find out what kind of snake it might be. The chance to witness a part of God's creation is thrilling, and as they cautiously proceed, they view it as a blessed opportunity. Two people encounter the same scenario but the way they interpret the news is vastly different.

Renewing our minds with Scripture will boost our emotional state by changing what we're focusing on. We shift our focus off of our trials and onto our blessings in Christ Jesus. It brings us to the place of having a confident expectation of the good God is leading us into.

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<sup>37</sup>Mike Robinson. Its Psychology: Learn All About Psychology The Four Major Stress Hormones. February 28, 2023. [www.itopsycho.com/stress-hormones/](http://www.itopsycho.com/stress-hormones/)

When it comes to wellness if you're letting your mind go unchecked, you're allowing stress hormones course throughout your entire body. That's why so many people have health challenges throughout their bodies.

When you become aware of your thoughts, your emotions, and your actions, you're raising your level of self-awareness. With self-awareness comes the opportunity to change how we react to situations. This allows us to fulfill our potential and become the best version of our self (self-actualization) a phrase coined by Abraham Maslow. When we become aware of our thoughts, emotions, and actions, we deepen our understanding of ourselves—a journey that reflects the way God has intricately designed us. In Christ, we are created anew, empowered to embrace our true identity and purpose. This self-awareness opens the door to transformation, enabling us to respond to life's challenges with grace and intention. As we align ourselves with God's vision for our lives, we can fulfill our potential and become the best version of ourselves, reflecting Christ in us (See John 15).

The more you practice a certain way to think the more your brain strengthens that healthy pathway of thought patterns and replaces negative patterns of thinking. For instance, if you used to react to stress by lashing out at others or isolating yourself, you might find yourself doing the same unless you shift your mindset when stress arises. Instead, when you notice you're feeling stressed, you can choose to open your Bible, step outside for some deep breaths, and thank God for the blessings in your day. By consistently practicing these responses whenever you feel

stressed, they can eventually become your new default reactions. And again, over time, as you do this, this helps reverse those health challenges because your body can heal because you are not constantly living in a state of fight, flight, freeze, or fawn response. Stephen Covey the author of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, says it takes 21 days to form a habit.<sup>38</sup> In less than one month you can completely eradicate negative thought patterns with healthy God-honoring thoughts. Whatever we focus on is what gets wired into our brains.

### **Disputing Questions**

Use these questions to challenge your automatic thoughts. You will find each question helpful for many different thoughts. Several examples are also presented to help you get started.

1. Do I know for certain that

\_\_\_\_\_?

Example: Do I know for certain that I won't have anything to say?

2. Am I 100% sure that

\_\_\_\_\_?

Example: Am I 100% sure that my anxiety will show?

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<sup>38</sup>Stephen Covey. *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. Simon & Schuster; Anniversary edition. May 19, 2020.

3. What evidence do I have that

\_\_\_\_\_?

What evidence do I have that the opposite is true?

More examples: What evidence do I have that they did not understand my speech? What evidence do I have that they did understand my speech?

4. What is the worst that could happen? How bad is that? How can I cope with that?

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5. Is there another explanation for

\_\_\_\_\_?

Example: Is there another explanation for his refusal to have coffee with me?

6. Does \_\_\_\_\_ have to lead to

or equal \_\_\_\_\_?

Example: Does "being nervous" have to lead to or equal "looking stupid"?

7. Is there another point of view?

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8. What does \_\_\_\_\_ mean?

Does \_\_\_\_\_ mean that I am a(n)  
\_\_\_\_\_?

Example: What does "sounding like an idiot" mean?  
Does the fact that I stumbled over my words mean  
that I sound like an idiot?

The promising news is that once we restore balance and normalize our limbic system, various other aspects of our well-being can also fall into alignment. This balance will have far-reaching effects throughout our bodies.

Imagine your limbic system as a crucial component of your good health. If it's impaired or malfunctioning, attempting to heal solely through supplements or dietary changes is akin to trying to drain a bathtub while the tap remains on.

It's remarkable how our thoughts, emotions, and choices profoundly influence not just our health but our entire life's trajectory, despite what some may perceive as mere external factors. Through continual renewal of our minds with the teachings of Jesus Christ, we will experience profound hope, joy, and peace. Gradually, we rewire our brains for positivity. By renewing your mind, every facet of your life transforms.

“A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of” (Luke 6:45). It’s what you’re seeing in your heart that gives power to what you say.

When it comes to faith, there is usually a lot of focus on speaking forth what you want to see. But this verse shows us that it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks. We are not meant to speak empty words that don’t come from the heart. We have to change the image in our hearts first so that what we speak is life- the Word of God. When this happens, our words won’t feel forced; instead, they’ll flow naturally from within us.

### **What Vision Do You Have in Your Heart?**

What you see in your heart is what you will see manifest in your life. Changing your beliefs will lead to better health. Your heart is affected by your vision. So what vision are you keeping in your heart?

Abraham had a nephew named Lot, and Lot caused a lot of trouble for Abraham. Lot’s name means “covering or veil”<sup>39</sup> (something that prevents someone from seeing clearly). It was only when Lot left Abram that Abram began to see what God wanted him to see.

“And the Lord said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him: “Lift your eyes now and look from the place where you are—northward, southward, eastward, and westward; for all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants forever” (Genesis 13:14–15).

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<sup>39</sup>[www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h3876/kjv/wlc/0-1/](http://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h3876/kjv/wlc/0-1/)

“All the land which you see I give to you” — God’s principle is this: See it first (by faith) and then you will receive it.

The devil wants to trouble your heart with negative images that cause you to be pessimistic in your outlook. He knows that negative images will affect your heart, and once your heart is affected, your whole life is affected. That is why Proverbs 4:23 tells us to guard our hearts—because out of the heart springs the issues/forces of life.

When we begin to observe our thoughts, we can ask ourselves: Are these thoughts supporting my health and life goals? Do they reflect a Christ-like mindset (after all, we have the mind of Christ)? Set a timer on your phone for 10 minutes; when it goes off, take a moment to reflect on what you were thinking and jot it down. Then, get more intentional: set a timer for 2 minutes, close your eyes, and simply listen to your thoughts.

By setting a SMART goal tailored to the individual’s condition and circumstances, you can take proactive steps toward managing chronic fatigue and inflammation while working within your limitations. Regular monitoring and adjustment of the goal will help ensure progress and continued improvement over time.

## SMART Goals

**SPECIFIC:** Be very clear about what you want to achieve. Consider breaking the goal down into smaller steps.

**MEASURABLE:** How will you know when you have achieved your goal? What will you be doing at that time? What will others notice you doing? What will be different? What will you have started or be doing regularly? What will you have stopped or be doing less of?

**ACHIEVABLE:** Ensure your goals are not too high. Don't set yourself up to fail! Consider setting smaller goals on your way to the big one. Celebrate your successes. If you don't achieve what you set out to, then ask what you could do differently, what would make it more likely to succeed next time?



**REALISTIC & RESOURCED:** Is this achievable with the resources I have? Are there any other resources you need before you can, or to help you, achieve your goal? How can you access these resources? What problems might you have? What can you do to minimize those problems?

**TIME LIMITED:** Set a reasonable time limit to achieve your goal. 1 week, 1 month, 6 months, 1 year, 5 years? Consider different (smaller) time limits for smaller steps.

How much have you been impacted by negative thoughts, worry, fear, and anxiety?

Mark your answers on the scales below.

On a scale of 0 to 100:

1. How much of a negative effect has my problem had on my life?

0.....50..... 100

NO EFFECT

EXTREMELY NEGATIVE EFFECT

2. How important is it to me to feel better?

0.....50..... 100

NO EFFECT

EXTREMELY NEGATIVE EFFECT

3. How willing am I to make getting better a priority in my life?

0.....50..... 100

NO EFFECT

EXTREMELY NEGATIVE EFFECT

If you scored less than 50 on two or three scales, you may be considering change, but still feel uncertain. If you scored 50 or more on two or three scales, you are ready to change.

- You have decided that it is time to change and you are prepared to dedicate some time each day to getting better.

Now ask yourself another 3 questions:

- Where am I now?

- Where do I want to be?
- How will I get there?

Make a plan and start working toward it.

Here's the good news: God's plans for you are even greater than your own.

Proverbs 16:9: "In their hearts humans plan their course, but the Lord establishes their steps."

Jeremiah 29:11: "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

Ephesians 3:20: "Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us."

### **The Miracle of Our Nervous System**

Our nervous system is a miracle in action.

The nervous system comprises billions of nerve cells called neurons, organized in an elaborate network throughout the body. This intricate arrangement allows for the transmission of electrical and chemical signals that facilitate communication between different parts of the body and the brain.

The nervous system exhibits remarkable adaptability and plasticity, meaning it can reorganize and form new connections in response to changes in the environment, experiences, or injuries. This ability underlies learning, memory, and recovery from injuries, making it incredibly versatile.

Nerve impulses travel at incredible speeds along neural pathways, allowing for rapid responses to stimuli. This quick transmission enables essential

functions like reflex actions and conscious movements to occur almost instantaneously.

The nervous system seamlessly integrates information from various sensory receptors throughout the body, allowing us to perceive and interpret our surroundings accurately. This integration is crucial for activities ranging from simple tasks like sensing touch to complex cognitive processes like decision-making.

The nervous system plays a vital role in maintaining internal balance and regulating bodily functions through processes like autonomic control of heart rate, breathing, and digestion. This regulation ensures optimal functioning of bodily systems and adaptation to changing internal and external conditions.

The nervous system is responsible for generating consciousness and awareness, allowing us to experience sensations, emotions, thoughts, and perceptions. This profound aspect of neural functioning gives rise to our subjective experiences and sense of self.

Overall, the complexity, adaptability, speed, integration, regulation, and consciousness exhibited by the nervous system collectively contribute to its awe-inspiring nature, often described as miraculous in its design and operation. This should lead us to praise God for we are wonderfully made.

Psalm 139:14: "I praise You because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Your works are wonderful, I know that full well."

The circuitry in your brain is shaped by the specific experiences you've had, and it can be changed as a result of your continuing experiences. For example, connections between particular neurons are strengthened when you use them. Some of us continue to use our memories of multiplication tables to calculate math equations, and those connections remain as strong as when we were in school. But some of us rely on calculators, so we don't regularly use the brain circuits storing the multiplication tables, and our memory of these tables weakens. If you want to change the anxiety you experience, you need to change the neural connections that lead to anxiety responses.

The vagus nerve, a crucial component of the parasympathetic nervous system, plays a significant role in regulating various bodily functions, including those related to emotions and stress responses.

### **Relationship Between the Vagus Nerve and the Limbic System**

- The limbic system is a complex network of brain structures involved in emotional processing, memory, and motivation. It includes structures such as the amygdala, hippocampus, and hypothalamus.

- The vagus nerve has extensive connections with the limbic system, providing bidirectional communication between the brain and various organs involved in emotional and stress responses, including the heart, lungs, and digestive system.

- Activation of the vagus nerve can influence activity within the limbic system, modulating emotional

responses and stress levels. For example, vagal stimulation has been shown to reduce activity in the amygdala, a key structure involved in fear and anxiety.

#### Vagal Tone:

- Vagal tone refers to the activity of the vagus nerve, specifically its ability to regulate bodily functions and modulate physiological responses to stress. Higher vagal tone is associated with greater resilience to stress, better emotional regulation, and improved overall health.

- Vagal tone is measured by assessing heart rate variability (HRV), which reflects the variation in time intervals between heartbeats. Higher HRV is indicative of a stronger vagal tone and greater flexibility in responding to environmental and emotional challenges.

The various exercises listed in this book including mindfulness, meditation on the Word, deep breathing exercises, and others have been shown to promote neuroplasticity and enhance vagal tone.

- By engaging in these practices consistently, individuals can strengthen the connections between brain regions involved in emotional regulation and vagal modulation, leading to improved vagal tone and better stress resilience.

- Additionally, practices that promote relaxation and emotional well-being, such as social support, physical activity, and healthy lifestyle habits, can also contribute to enhanced vagal tone and overall nervous system function.

In summary, the vagus nerve interacts with the limbic system to regulate emotional and stress responses, while the vagal tone reflects the activity of the vagus nerve and its influence on physiological functioning. Brain rewiring through various practices can enhance vagal tone and promote greater resilience to stress, contributing to overall well-being.

What causes poor vagus nerve function? “There are two main causes of vagus nerve dysfunction: previous infection or inflammation and physical or psychological stress.”<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup>Professor Owen Epstein. Vagus nerve dysfunction: What is it and What are the Main Symptoms? Top Doctors United Kingdom. [www.topdoctors.co.uk/medical-articles/vagus-nerve-dysfunction-what-is-it-and-what-are-the-main-symptoms#](http://www.topdoctors.co.uk/medical-articles/vagus-nerve-dysfunction-what-is-it-and-what-are-the-main-symptoms#) July 15, 2021.

Small Group Questions  
Chapter 3 Identifying Negative Thought Patterns  
and Triggers

1. What strategies can you use to gradually face the situations, people, places, or thoughts you normally avoid? How can breaking down your avoidance targets into manageable steps help you overcome your anxiety?

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2. How can the story of Peter walking on water serve as a metaphor for overcoming anxiety? What can we learn from his experience about keeping our focus on Jesus amid life's storms?

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3. Reflecting on the concept of triggers for anxiety, what are some strategies we can employ to identify and address our triggers effectively? How can understanding our triggers empower us to break free from recurring cycles of negativity and anxiety aligning our thoughts with Scripture?

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4. How does the concept of exposure-based treatment challenge our instinctual response to avoid anxiety-inducing situations? How can we cultivate the courage to confront our fears despite experiencing discomfort and anxiety?

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5. What practices or habits can we adopt to ensure that our hearts are guarded against negative images and pessimistic outlooks? How can we actively cultivate a vision in our hearts that aligns with the promises and blessings that God has for us, as exemplified in Abraham's experience in Genesis 13:14-15?

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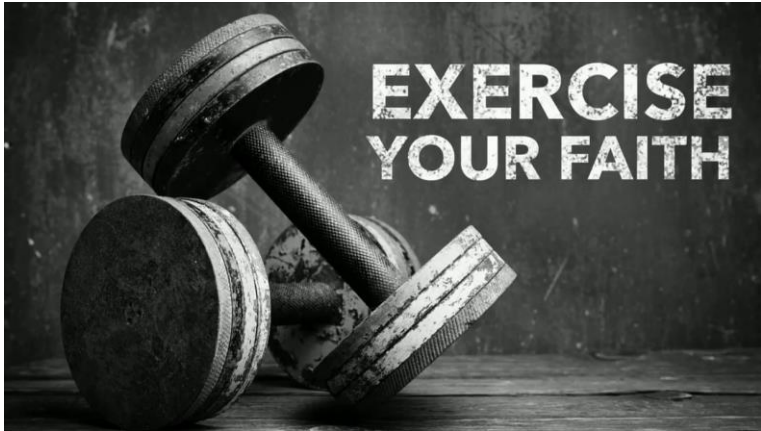
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### **Part III: Faith Exercises**



**Chapter 4**  
**Techniques for Strengthening Faith Through**  
**Mind Renewal**



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<sup>41</sup>[www.stevenaitchison.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/strong\\_mind.jpg](http://www.stevenaitchison.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/strong_mind.jpg)

## **Biblical Study: You're Not Alone**

Whenever I encounter a problem, my instinct is to immediately dive into finding a solution. However, I've learned that I can save significant time and energy by taking my problem to my heavenly Father in prayer. He has the answer to the problem(s) that I seek and the provision I need He is faithful to provide me in Christ. Despite years spent pursuing various remedies to improve my health, I eventually realized that the true solution was Christ within me all along. By relying solely on my efforts to fix my health issues, I inadvertently placed the burden on myself, which ultimately resulted in the worsening of my condition. Though I prayed for divine assistance, my actions of constant searching and seeking for solutions revealed a lack of complete trust in His provision. It is important to note that when we ask God for wisdom He is faithful to give it to us (James 1:5) and sometimes He will provide it through research. However, a consistent focus on our problems is not what God desires for our lives.

Through exploring the trials of Biblical figures, I discovered the peace I sought already exists in Jesus. In our journey of faith, we find comfort and strength in knowing we are not alone. Examining the experiences of those who trusted in God amid trials offers profound insights and inspiration. Their stories guide us through our challenges, reminding us that faith is a shared endeavor across generations. God has also gifted us with fellow believers who can encourage us to trust in God and the promises He has made.

As we delve into their journeys and study their narratives, we uncover deep parallels with our own lives, illuminating the path toward the renewal of our minds. Through this collective tapestry of human experience, we find reassurance, wisdom, and the unyielding presence of divine grace, fortifying our faith amidst life's uncertainties. The book *The Courage to Hope: A Guide to Thrive in Turbulent Times*<sup>42</sup> will serve as a valuable resource for discovering the incredible works of God during the most challenging times in people's lives.

Consider the promise of peace:

- "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid" (John 14:27).
- "And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:7).

Was my life governed by my challenges and circumstances or by the peace of God?

- "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, for to this you were called as members of one body. And be thankful" (Colossians 3:15).

True and lasting joy doesn't come from a changed circumstance. Happy emotions stem from happy thoughts. Happy thoughts come from a renewed mind

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<sup>42</sup>Dr. Matthew Webster. *The Courage to Hope: A Guide to Thrive in Turbulent Times*. Kindle Direct Publishing. 2026.

where I change my focus from my problems to magnifying God. The peace of Christ can rule and reign in my heart, guarding my heart and mind even before I feel completely healed. Live in faith instead of fear and let gratitude reign supreme in your heart.

“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God” (Philippians 4:6).

Balancing your nervous system comes from attentively caring for your soul (the seat of your feelings/emotions) through the renewal of your mind. As you renew your mind everything else in your life is transformed.

“A good man brings good things (underlined emphasis is mine) out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of” (Luke 6:45). We are not meant to speak empty words that don’t come from the heart. We have to change the image in our hearts first so that what we speak, the Word of God, is a proclamation of our faith, we believe it.

Changing your outlook comes as we are given beautiful word pictures of your life full of the promises in God’s Word. This will lead to breakthroughs in your health and is a key part of mind renewal. What vision are you keeping in your heart for your life?

“Surely Your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever” (Psalm 23:6).

Goodness in Hebrew means prosperity<sup>43</sup> and mercy here could be translated as lovingkindness or favor.<sup>44</sup>

If you look up the Hebrew word for “follow” it means “to chase, hunt, or pursue.”<sup>45</sup>

Psalm 23:6 can be read as follows: “Surely prosperity and Your loving kindness shall pursue me all the days of my life and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever” (Psalm 23:6).

Do you believe that you always have the favor of God in Christ Jesus? Do you believe that because of your union life with Jesus, prosperity will follow you throughout your life as it did for Joseph in Genesis 37-50?

### **A Vision For Your Heart From Psalm 23**

The Lord is my shepherd = Relationship  
I lack nothing = Supply  
He makes me lie down in green pastures = REST  
He leads me beside quiet waters = REFRESHMENT  
He restores my soul = HEALING  
He guides me along the right paths = GUIDANCE  
For His name’s sake = PURPOSE  
Even though I walk through the darkest valley =  
OVERCOMING TRIALS  
I will fear no evil = PEACE  
For You are with me = FAITHFULNESS  
Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me =  
PROTECTION

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<sup>43</sup>[www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h2896/kjv/wlc/0-1/](http://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h2896/kjv/wlc/0-1/)

<sup>44</sup>[www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h2617/kjv/wlc/0-1/](http://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h2617/kjv/wlc/0-1/)

<sup>45</sup>[www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h7291/kjv/wlc/0-1/](http://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h7291/kjv/wlc/0-1/)



You prepare a table before me in the presence of my  
enemies = HOPE

You anoint my head with oil = CARE OVER ME

My cup overflows = ABUNDANCE

Surely Your goodness and mercy will follow me  
all the days of my life = BLESSING OF PROSPERITY  
And I will dwell in the house of the LORD = SECURITY  
Forever = ETERNITY

### **Journey of Recovery Goal Setting**

Answer the following questions to help set some goals  
in your recovery journey.

In the future, I'd like to see myself...

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In one year I'd like to...

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In eight weeks I'd like to...

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If I weren't so concerned about \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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I would... \_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_\_

### **Pinpointing the Origin of Anxiety**

If you notice persistent thoughts revolving around unsettling ideas or images, amplifying your anxiety, or if you find yourself fixating on uncertainties, consumed by worries, or caught in a loop attempting to solve problems, it's likely cortex-driven anxiety at play. The amygdala pathway, on the other hand, can create the powerful physical effects that anxiety has on the body. The amygdala's numerous connections to other parts of the brain allow it to mobilize a variety of bodily reactions very quickly. In less than a tenth of a second, the amygdala can provide a surge of adrenaline, increase blood pressure and heart rate, create muscle tension, and more.

The amygdala pathway doesn't produce thoughts that you're aware of, and it operates more quickly than the cortex can. We, humans, aren't consciously aware of the way the amygdala attaches anxiety to situations or objects, just as we aren't consciously aware of the

liver aiding digestion. However, the amygdala's emotional processing has profound effects on our behavior. The amygdala is at the very heart of where the anxiety response is produced. Although the cortex can initiate or contribute to anxiety, the amygdala is required to trigger the anxiety response. Therefore, it creates many aspects of an anxiety response without your conscious knowledge or control. If you feel like your anxiety has no apparent cause and doesn't make logical sense, you're usually experiencing the effects of anxiety arising from the amygdala pathway. Your awareness of the amygdala is likely to be based on your experience of its effects on you—namely bodily changes, nervousness, wanting to avoid a certain situation, or having aggressive impulses.

The amygdala is the source of many of our emotional reactions, both positive and negative. When someone violates your personal space or gets in your face, it's the amygdala that produces the rage you feel. On the other hand, when you meet someone who looks like your grandmother and you experience a warm feeling of affection for this lady you don't even know, that's also the amygdala, in this case accessing a pleasant emotional memory.

The cortex enables us to reason, create language, and engage in complicated thinking, such as logic and mathematics. Changing our thoughts can help us prevent our cognitive processes from initiating or contributing to anxiety. Until recently, treatments for anxiety were less likely to consider the amygdala pathway.

The role of the amygdala is to attach emotional significance to situations or objects and to form emotional memories. Those emotions and emotional memories can be positive or negative. In this book, we'll focus on the way the amygdala attaches anxiety to experiences and creates anxiety-producing memories.

Therapists often overlook the amygdala when treating anxiety disorders, which is surprising since most experiences of fear, anxiety, or panic stem from its activation. Even if anxious thoughts originate in the cortex, it's the amygdala that triggers the physical sensations of anxiety, like a racing heart, sweating and muscle tension. While family doctors and psychiatrists typically focus on medications to alleviate anxiety—such as Xanax (alprazolam), Ativan (lorazepam), and Klonopin (clonazepam)—they might not explicitly mention the amygdala. These medications often work by sedating the amygdala, providing quick relief from anxiety. However, they do not alter the amygdala's circuitry, meaning that while they can reduce anxiety responses, they fail to create long-term beneficial changes. Additionally, information travels directly from the thalamus to the amygdala, allowing it to react instinctively before the cortex can engage in rational thought.<sup>46</sup>

Consider Bethany, a ten-year-old girl who was looking for camping equipment in the basement of her home. She walked through a doorway and jumped back in

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<sup>46</sup>Catherine M. Pittman, PhD, Elizabeth M Karle, MLIS. *Rewire Your Anxious Brain: How to Use the Neuroscience of Fear to End Anxiety, Panic, and Worry*. New Harbinger Publications, Inc. Pages 14-15. 2015.

fear. Her reaction was triggered by a coat hanging on a coat rack. Her amygdala responded to the shape of the coat, which could have been an intruder, and caused her to jump out of reach of the “intruder” before she even realized what she’d seen. As an evolution-based safety measure, the amygdala is wired to react before the cortex can.

The quick reaction that results from the amygdala pathway is typically called the fight-or-flight response. A pounding heart, trembling, stomach distress, and hyperventilation are all related to the amygdala’s attempts to prepare the body for action.

Many people feel paralyzed when under extreme stress. When you’re experiencing the fight, flight, or freeze response, the amygdala is in the driver’s seat and you’re a passenger. That’s why, in emergencies, you often feel as though you’re observing yourself responding rather than consciously controlling your response. There’s a reason why we don’t feel in control in these moments, or in control of our anxiety: the amygdala isn’t just faster—it also has the neurological capability to override other brain processes. The thinking processes of the cortex are superseded and you’re under the influence of the amygdala. You may have already recognized that your anxiety often doesn’t make sense to your cortex and that your cortex can’t just reason it away. Therefore, strategies for coping with amygdala-based anxiety are essential, even though cortex-focused approaches are more commonly offered in treatment.

There is a distinct possibility that you may be suffering the effects of an amygdala-based memory.

Signs to tell if you are experiencing an amygdala-based memory include:

- Your heart rate increases drastically in certain situations.
- You feel a strong urge to escape from certain situations.
- You feel overwhelmed and can't think clearly in certain situations.
- Certain circumstances cause you to feel paralyzed and that you can't do anything yourself.
- In stressful situations it becomes difficult to breathe.
- Certain situations cause you to experience muscle tightness.
- You subconsciously avoid certain experiences, situations, or locations.
- You keep checking on things you don't need to.
- When in a certain place you can't relax or let your guard down.
- Events that don't seem significant can cause you to worry.
- You can end up in a panic very quickly.
- Certain situations cause you to become so angry you want to fight but your reaction doesn't make sense to you.

## **Understanding the Fight, Flight, Freeze, and Fawn Response**

The fight, flight, or freeze response refers to involuntary physiological changes that happen in the body and mind when a person feels threatened. This response exists to keep people safe, preparing them to face, escape, or hide from danger. However, people can experience this response whether the danger is real or not, which can lead to this response activating in situations where it is not necessary. People can also react to perceived threats in different ways, which is where the name "fight, flight, freeze, or fawn" comes from.

- **Fight takes action to eliminate the danger**
- **Flight involves escaping the danger**
- **Freeze involves becoming immobile**
- **Fawn Tries to Please/Appease the Person Who Represents a Threat to Prevent Harm**

These responses are activated by acute or chronic stressors.

### **What Happens During Fight or Flight?**

- **Rapid breathing and heart rate:** This allows the body to send more oxygenated blood to the muscles and brain, in case someone needs to take physical action to escape danger. This also causes an increase in blood pressure.
- **Flushed or pale skin:** As the body redirects blood to key areas, a person may develop a

paler face than usual, or it may alternate between pale and flushed.

- **Tense muscles:** As the muscles prepare to move, they can become tense, which may cause shaking or trembling. Muscle tension can also create a constricted feeling in the throat, and result in a person's voice becoming higher pitched.
- **Dilated pupils:** The pupils dilate to allow more light into the eyes, which allows someone to see better and observe their surroundings.
- **Dry mouth:** Constriction of the blood vessels around the mouth means that the salivary glands temporarily stop producing saliva, causing a dry mouth.

A person in fight or flight may feel extremely alert, agitated, confrontational, or like they need to leave a room or location. A severe fight-or-flight response can become a panic attack.

It can trigger asthma attacks in people with the condition.

### **Freeze state**

The freeze response involves a different physiological process than fight or flight. It has been described as "attentive immobility." While the person who is "frozen" is extremely alert, they are also unable to move or take action against the danger. Freezing causes:

- physical immobility
- a drop in heart rate, rather than an increase
- muscle tension



- pale skin
- sense of dread<sup>47</sup>

### **Fawn state**

The “fawn” response is a term used in the context of trauma and the body’s autonomic nervous system responses. It’s one of the four common trauma responses, alongside fight, flight, and freeze. The fawn response involves attempting to appease or please the perceived threat or aggressor to avoid harm or conflict.

In the fawn response, individuals may become overly accommodating, submissive, or self-sacrificing in their interactions with others, especially in situations where they feel threatened or unsafe. This can manifest as people-pleasing behavior, excessive agreeableness, or prioritizing the needs of others over their well-being.

The fawn response often develops as a coping mechanism in individuals who have experienced trauma or prolonged exposure to stress, particularly in environments where assertiveness or setting boundaries was not safe or encouraged. While the fawn response may temporarily mitigate conflict or appease others, it can ultimately lead to feelings of resentment, low self-esteem, and a lack of authenticity in relationships.

In the “fawn” response, individuals typically experience a combination of physiological symptoms that arise from the body’s autonomic nervous system reacting to perceived threat or stress. These symptoms may include:

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<sup>47</sup>[www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/fight-flight-or-freeze-response#fight-or-flight](http://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/fight-flight-or-freeze-response#fight-or-flight)

1. **Increased Heart Rate:** The heart rate may elevate as part of the body's preparation for dealing with a perceived threat or stressor.
2. **Shallow Breathing:** Breathing may become rapid and shallow as the body prepares for action or as a response to anxiety or stress.
3. **Muscle Tension:** Muscles may tense up in preparation for action or as a result of heightened stress and anxiety.
4. **Sweating:** Increased sweating is a common response to stress or anxiety as the body attempts to regulate temperature and manage heightened arousal.
5. **Digestive Issues:** Stress and anxiety can impact the digestive system, leading to symptoms such as stomach cramps, nausea, or changes in bowel habits.
6. **Dizziness or Light-headedness:** Changes in blood flow and circulation, along with hyperventilation, can sometimes result in feelings of dizziness or light-headedness.
7. **Trembling or Shaking:** Tremors or shaking may occur as a result of heightened physiological arousal and the release of stress hormones.
8. **Difficulty Concentrating:** Stress and anxiety can impair cognitive function, making it difficult to concentrate or focus on tasks.
9. **Fatigue:** Chronic stress and anxiety associated with the fawn response can lead to feelings of fatigue or exhaustion as the body's resources are depleted.

10. Sleep Disturbances: Difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep may occur due to heightened arousal and increased levels of stress hormones.

Anxiety is a complex emotional response that's similar to fear. Both arise from similar brain processes and cause similar physiological and behavioral reactions; both originate in portions of the brain designed to help all animals deal with danger. Fear and anxiety differ, however, in that fear is typically associated with a clear, present, and identifiable threat, whereas anxiety occurs in the absence of immediate peril. In other words, we feel fear when we are in trouble—like when a truck crosses the center line and heads toward us. We feel anxiety when we have a sense of dread or discomfort but aren't, at that moment, in danger. Everyone experiences fear and anxiety.

If you don't know what causes your anxiety, you're at a disadvantage when you try to change it. Anxiety can limit people's lives in surprising ways—many of which may not seem to be due to anxiety. For example, while some people are plagued by worries that haunt every waking moment, others may find it difficult to fall asleep. Some may have a hard time leaving home, while for other individuals a fear of public speaking may threaten their job. A new mother may have to complete a series of rituals for hours each morning before she can leave her child with a sitter. A plumber's anxiety about encountering large spiders may reduce his income to a level that won't support his family.

## **Anxiety Controlled Two Ways**

Research has shown that two fairly separate pathways in the brain can create anxiety. One path begins in the cerebral cortex, the large, convoluted, gray part of the brain, and involves our perceptions and thoughts about situations.

The cortex not only processes sights, sounds, and other sensory perceptions, but it also assigns meaning and memories to them. For example, when you see an elderly man and hear his voice, you recognize him as your grandfather and understand the significance of what he's saying. In addition to helping you interpret situations, the cortex enables logical reasoning, language production, imagination, and planning for various responses. It plays a crucial role in modifying your reactions to threats, which is especially important when managing anxiety. The cortex assesses the effectiveness of different responses to perceived dangers. For instance, it allows you to choose not to physically confront your boss if you feel threatened by job loss or to remain calm instead of fleeing when you hear fireworks. By reading this book, you're actively engaging your cortex to explore new strategies for coping with anxiety. The pathway from your cortex to anxiety begins with your sensory organs—your eyes, ears, nose, taste buds, and skin—all of which gather information about the world around you.<sup>48</sup>

The other travels more directly through the amygdalas, two small, almond-shaped structures, one

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<sup>48</sup>Catherine M. Pittman, PhD, Elizabeth M Karle, MLIS. *Rewire Your Anxious Brain: How to Use the Neuroscience of Fear to End Anxiety, Panic, and Worry*. New Harbinger Publications, Inc. Pages.2-4. 2015.

on each side of the brain. The amygdala (generally referred to in the singular) triggers the ancient fight-or-flight response, which has been passed down virtually unchanged from the earliest vertebrates on Earth. Both pathways play a role in anxiety, although some types of anxiety are more associated with the cortex, while others can be directly attributed to the amygdala. In psychotherapy for anxiety, attention has typically been focused on the cortex pathway, using therapeutic approaches that involve changing thoughts and arguing logically against anxiety. However, a growing body of research suggests that the role of the amygdala must also be understood to develop a more complete picture of how anxiety is created and how it can be controlled.<sup>49</sup>

### **Helping Your Amygdala Get Past Panic**

You may wonder what the best way to cope with a panic attack is. If you're suddenly in the midst of a panic attack, three amygdala-based coping strategies will work to calm you down: deep breathing, muscle relaxation, and exercise. They can't immediately shut down all of the activations that have been created in your body, but they will reduce your discomfort and shorten the duration of the panic attack.

- **Deep Breathing:** When experiencing a panic attack, practicing slow breathing can be immensely beneficial. Symptoms like tingling or dizziness often stem from hyperventilation, where breathing becomes too rapid. Initiating slow, deliberate breaths that fully expand the chest and engage the diaphragm—a muscle

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<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

situated below the lungs—can be a helpful strategy. Research indicates that slow breathing effectively reduces activity in the amygdala, providing relief during moments of distress.

- **Muscle relaxation:** Engaging in physical activity or pacing during a panic attack is encouraged. This activity helps to dissipate the surplus adrenaline in your system, consequently abbreviating the duration of the panic attack. Remember, your body is primed for fight or flight responses, making physical exertion a natural response.

It's crucial to resist the urge to flee when experiencing panic. Although panic attacks are distressing, they are not physically harmful. In reality, the sensations experienced during a panic attack are indicative of a responsive and healthy body. While fleeing may provide temporary relief, it reinforces the dominance of panic attacks and impedes long-term resolution. Whenever possible, endeavor to relax, breathe deeply, and remain present in the situation. Despite its difficulty, this approach is vital for gaining control over the amygdala, as it learns from experiences. If you escape the situation, the amygdala learns avoidance rather than recognizing safety.

A panic attack is only a feeling, although it is a very intense one. When the fight, flight, or freeze response is activated and you experience physical symptoms, the cortex's interpretation of those symptoms may cause anxiety to spiral out of control. If you think the

symptoms mean you're having a heart attack, are going to lose control of yourself, or are going crazy, this will only worsen the panic attack. Recognizing that you're experiencing a panic attack and nothing more, and not buying into the cortex's misinterpretation of your amygdala-based symptoms, will help you recover more quickly.

A key strategy to prevent panic attacks is to refrain from excessively worrying about them. Continuously dwelling on the possibility of experiencing a panic attack can increase the likelihood of one occurring. It's crucial to prevent your mind from dwelling on thoughts related to panic or its symptoms. When feeling anxious, fixating on bodily sensations like sweaty palms or a racing heart can escalate into a full-blown panic attack. Instead, distract yourself by redirecting your thoughts away from panic by focusing on whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things" (Philippians 4:8). In the panic, fix your mind's eye on Jesus and allow His peace to bring calmness to your mind.

Individuals who suffer from panic attacks often fear judgment from others or worry about embarrassing themselves. However, it's important not to let your mind speculate about what others might be thinking. Chances are, they are not aware of your internal experiences, nor are they likely to be overly concerned. Dwelling on others' perceptions only adds unnecessary stress during an already challenging situation.

While these strategies may help prevent panic attacks, their effectiveness diminishes once a panic attack begins. During a full-blown episode, anxiety may overwhelm clear thinking as the amygdala takes control, suppressing the influence of the cortex. In such instances, focus on slow breathing, relaxation techniques, and distraction until the panic subsides. Remember, panic attacks are temporary and will pass. If others are present, their support can be invaluable. Encourage them to remind you to breathe deeply and relax your muscles, which naturally tense up during an adrenaline surge. Utilizing relaxation methods with assistance can significantly reduce panic levels more rapidly.

When you get back into that social engagement state, it is an amazing place to be, your body can handle external stressors. As you start retraining your brain/ renewing your mind you will feel your nervous system come back into balance, the state where you feel joy, where you feel present, you feel alert, you're socially engaged in the moment, and your concentration is much improved.

Negative thinking patterns can initiate the fight-flight or freeze-stress response and lead to panic attacks. These negative thinking patterns are referred to as old wired loops (O.W.L.s). Old wired loops refer to entrenched or habitual ways of thinking that have become deeply ingrained over time. Old-wired loops in thinking can hinder personal growth, problem-solving, and adaptation to new situations.

Second Timothy 1:7 says, "For God has not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, love, and self-control".



We're called to walk by faith, and through our connection to Jesus (John 15) produce amazing fruit: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23a).

Awareness of your (O.W.L.s) is key. If you're not aware of these old wired loops you can't rewire them out. So, by changing your thoughts, you change your emotions and obtain the peace that transcends all understanding.

### **Old Wired Loops (O.W.L.s) Worksheet**

Look over the list of 25 commonly held old wired loops. Write a number next to each one and add up your score when you finish.

0=never 1=occasionally 2=sometimes 3=often

1. Ruminating: This occurs when you constantly think about your trials and can't get them out of your mind.

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2. Over-analyzing your health: You do many things to measure and try to make sure your health is optimal. You might weigh yourself multiple times throughout the day, record every food you eat, track your sleep, and meticulously check your heart rate.

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3. Blaming: You may be quick to blame your health or how you feel on other people or circumstances. If you're in a fight, it's the

other person's fault.

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4. Body scanning: This occurs when you are frequently monitoring and searching for health challenges in your body.
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5. Correcting others: telling them what to do, controlling behaviors.
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6. Indecision: You find it hard to make even simple decisions such as which shirt you should wear or what you should have to eat for dinner. You go back and forth on whether you should take a supplement or not. You tend to have others make decisions for you.
- 

7. Searching the environment: you may constantly search the environment for a trigger to find the cause of your health challenges such as EMF waves, toxic mold, chemicals, etc...
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8. Living in the past: you may bring up past stressors or trials and ruminate on them.

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9. Complaining: you may complain about your trials or how you feel often.

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10. Allow your health challenges to define you. I'm not a good parent or spouse because I am not able to...

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11. Predicting health challenges: you believe you will feel negative for the upcoming event. You predict you will have health problems after eating at a restaurant.

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12. Lack of self-care and fun: You don't feel like showering. You opt out of activities that you used to find enjoyable.

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13. Comparing: You compare yourself to others. You also compare how you currently feel to how you used to feel before your trials.

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14. Living and planning your day based on how you feel.

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15. Setting high expectations for yourself or perfectionism.

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16. Holding to bitterness, resentment, and unforgiveness in relationships.

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17. Over-analyzing social situations: you may rehearse conversations beforehand or replay conversations afterward.

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18. Fearing your health or trials will get worse.

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19. Feeling overwhelmed easily.

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20. Being impatient: you may eat fast or skim through what you're reading without trying to comprehend it slowly.

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21. Wishing things would be different.

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22. Thinking you are too far gone and sick for things to work. You may think you are too old or you have been through too much stress or trials to be helped. You start doubting that you can get healthy.

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23. Excessive avoiding certain places, people, things, and situations.

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24. Mood instability: you may be quick to anger, irritability, sadness, or frustration.

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25. Justifying your trials or health challenges and having to explain them to others.

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Total Score \_\_\_\_\_

Did your total score surprise you? There are many subconscious thoughts we have every day that we are unaware of. Taking each thought captive (2 Corinthians 10:5) begins as we recognize the thoughts that we have each day.

### **How to Wire O.W.L.s Out of Your Mind**

As old wired loops occur disrupt that thought before it turns into a negative emotion and behavior. This prevents the flight, fight, or freeze response. You can

do this by stating “Enemy flee in Jesus’ name”. Or “Next thought”. You are telling your limbic system to stop going into the fear-based anxiety mode.

You might be successful in interrupting a thought by specifically telling yourself “Stop!” a technique called thought stopping. However, the next step is crucial. If you replace the thought with another thought, it’s more likely that you’ll keep the first thought out of your mind. Imagine you’re working in your garden, and you find yourself constantly worried about encountering a snake. In that moment, tell yourself “Stop!” and shift your focus to what God’s Word says. You could meditate on Philippians 4:6-7: “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.” This practice of replacing worry with Scripture is a powerful way to renew your mind. “Don’t simply erase negative thoughts —replace them!” This is the best approach for anxiety-igniting thoughts.

Choose a healthy pathway by centering your focus on Jesus, reflecting on what He has achieved for you and the person you’ve become in Him. Aim to do this practice multiple times daily. Fear-driven reactions align with the enemy’s intentions for us – yet, we can win the battle in our minds, causing such thoughts to flee with him. Redirect your attention to the Lord whenever intrusive thoughts arise. Draw strength from Scripture, offer praise to God, and cultivate gratitude within your heart.

By substituting anxiety-inducing thoughts with alternative, engaging stimuli, you increase the likelihood of averting a return to those distressing thoughts.

## Small Group Questions

### Chapter 4 Techniques for Strengthening Faith through Mind Renewal

1. How can we actively shift our focus from our problems to God, living in faith instead of fear, and allowing gratitude to fill our hearts, as described in the Scriptures and personal experiences shared?

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2. In what ways do you think renewing our minds and changing our beliefs, as mentioned in Luke 6:45 and through personal testimonies, can impact our physical health and overall well-being? How can we practically implement these principles in our daily lives?

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3. How can we distinguish between cortex-driven anxiety and amygdala-driven anxiety in our own experiences, and how might understanding this distinction affect our approach to managing anxiety?

Considering the amygdala's role in attaching emotional significance to situations or objects, how can we utilize this knowledge to reframe our responses to anxiety-provoking triggers and create more positive emotional associations?

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4. How do the fight, flight, freeze, and fawn responses manifest in our daily lives, and how can recognizing these responses help us better understand and manage our anxiety?

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5. How do you think becoming more aware of your negative thinking patterns, or old wired loops (O.W.L.s), can impact your daily life and mental well-being? What strategies do you currently use to disrupt these patterns when they arise, and do you find them effective?

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## Chapter 5

### Cultivating Emotional and Spiritual Well-Being



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<sup>50</sup>[www.df6yevl24pl4a.cloudfront.net/filer\\_public\\_thumbnails/filer\\_public/16/1d/161d-aa23-90e8-4cde-8c07-71289cd86e80/200617-tw-treasure.jpg\\_\\_680x380\\_q85\\_subsampling-2.jpg](http://www.df6yevl24pl4a.cloudfront.net/filer_public_thumbnails/filer_public/16/1d/161d-aa23-90e8-4cde-8c07-71289cd86e80/200617-tw-treasure.jpg__680x380_q85_subsampling-2.jpg)

## 50 Common Cognitive Distortions

### 1. Personalizing

Taking something personally that may not be personal. Seeing events as consequences of your actions when there are other possibilities. For example, believing someone's brusque tone must be because they're irritated with you.

Personalizing, also known as attribution error or externalizing blame, is a cognitive distortion where individuals tend to attribute external events or circumstances to themselves, even when there is little or no evidence to support such a connection. Essentially, they take things too personally, assuming that they are the cause of negative outcomes or experiences, even when other factors are likely at play.

Here is an example of the cognitive disorder of personalizing: Sarah has been feeling stressed at work lately due to tight deadlines and high expectations from her boss. One day, she submits a project report that receives some constructive criticism from her supervisor. Instead of considering that her supervisor might be providing feedback to help improve the project, Sarah immediately assumes that the criticism reflects her incompetence. She starts to think, "I must be terrible at my job if my boss is criticizing my work," and feels overwhelmed with self-doubt and insecurity.

In this example, Sarah is personalizing the feedback she received from her supervisor by attributing it solely to her shortcomings, rather than considering other possible factors, such as the complexity of the project or the pressures her supervisor might be facing. This cognitive distortion can exacerbate feelings of low self-esteem and inadequacy, leading individuals to unnecessarily blame themselves for negative outcomes beyond their control.

## 2. Mindreading

Mindreading, also known as fortune telling or jumping to conclusions, is a cognitive distortion where individuals make assumptions about what others are thinking or feeling without sufficient evidence. This distortion can lead individuals to inaccurately predict the thoughts, intentions, or reactions of others, often based on their own biases, insecurities, or past experiences.

People who engage in mindreading may interpret neutral or ambiguous social cues in a negative light, assuming that others harbor negative attitudes or judgments toward them. This can result in feelings of anxiety, self-consciousness, and social withdrawal, as individuals may avoid social interactions or situations out of fear of being misunderstood or rejected.

## 3. Negative predictions

Overestimating the likelihood that an action will have a negative outcome.

#### 4. Underestimating coping ability

Underestimating coping ability, also known as self-efficacy underestimation, is a cognitive distortion where individuals consistently underestimate their ability to cope with challenges or difficult situations. This cognitive bias can lead individuals to doubt their competence and resilience, even in situations where they might possess the necessary skills and resources to effectively manage the circumstances.

#### 5. Catastrophizing

Thinking of unpleasant events as catastrophes. Catastrophizing is characterized by magnifying the importance or severity of an event or situation and imagining the worst possible outcome. It involves dwelling excessively on potential negative outcomes and believing that these outcomes are more likely to occur than they are. People who catastrophize often engage in “what-if” thinking, imagining a chain of worst-case scenarios, which can lead to increased anxiety, stress, and feelings of helplessness.

#### 6. Biased attention toward signs of social rejection, and lack of attention to signs of social acceptance

For example, during social interactions, paying attention to someone yawning and assuming you’re boring them—but not paying the same degree of attention to other cues that suggest they are interested in what you’re saying (such as leaning toward you).

## 7. Negatively biased recall of social encounters

Remembering negatives from a social situation while not remembering positives. For example, remembering losing your place for a few seconds while giving a talk but not remembering the huge clap you got at the end.

## 8. Thinking an absence of effusiveness means something is wrong

Believing an absence of a smiley face in an email means someone is mad at you. Or, interpreting "You did a good job" as negative because you were expecting to be told that you did a "great" job.

## 9. Unrelenting standards

The belief is that achieving unrelentingly high standards is necessary to avoid a catastrophe. For example, the belief that making any mistakes will lead to your colleagues thinking you're useless.

## 10. Entitlement beliefs

Believing the same rules that apply to others should not apply to you. For example, believing you shouldn't need to do an internship even if that is the normal path to employment in your industry.



## 11. Justification and moral licensing

For example, when you've made progress toward a goal and therefore feel that it's ok to act in a way that is inconsistent with it.

## 12. Belief in a just world

For example, believing that poor people deserve to be poor. When you reflect on this type of thinking it should be clear this is erroneous thinking.

## 13. Seeing a situation only from your perspective

For example, failing to look at a topic of relationship tension from your partner's perspective.

14. Belief that self-criticism is an effective way to motivate yourself toward better future behavior.

It's not.

15. Recognizing feelings as causes of behavior, but not equally attending to how behavior influences thoughts and feelings

For example, you think, "When I have more energy, I'll exercise" but not, "Exercising will give me more energy."

## 16. All-or-nothing thinking

For example: "If I don't always get A's, I'm a complete failure."

## 17. Shoulds and musts

For example, "I should always give 100 percent." Sometimes, there are no important benefits of doing a task beyond a basic acceptable level.

## 18. Using feelings as the basis of a judgment, when the objective evidence does not support your feelings

For example: "I don't feel clean, even though I've washed my hands three times. Therefore, I should wash my hands again." (This is an example that may be indicative of obsessive-compulsive disorder.)

## 19. Basing future decisions on "sunk costs"

For example, investing more money in a business that is losing money because you've invested so much already.

## 20. Delusions

Holding a fixed, false belief, despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary. For example, believing you're overweight when you're 100 pounds.

## 21. Assuming your current feelings will stay the same in the future

For example, "I feel unable to cope today; therefore, I will feel unable to cope tomorrow."

## 22. Cognitive labeling

For example, mentally labeling your sister's boyfriend as a "loser" and not being open to subsequent evidence suggesting he isn't a loser.

## 23. The Halo Effect

For example, perceiving high-calorie foods as lower in calories if they're accompanied by a salad.

## 24. Minimizing

For example, "Yes, I won an important award—but that still doesn't mean I'm accomplished in my field."

## 25. Magnifying (aka cognitively exaggerating)

For example, blowing your own mistakes and flaws out of proportion and perceiving them as more significant than they are. Magnifying is making a mountain out of a molehill, but not quite to the same extent as catastrophizing.

## 26. Cognitive conformity

Seeing things the way people around you view them. Research has shown that this often happens at an unconscious level.

## 27. Overgeneralizing

Generalizing a belief that may have validity in some situations such as, "If you want something done well,

you should do it yourself" to every situation. This is a type of lack of psychological flexibility.

## 28. Blaming others

"I didn't get the promotion because my coworker sabotaged my chances." This mindset overlooks personal responsibility and the possibility of other factors affecting the outcome, placing all the blame on someone else instead of considering one's contributions or shortcomings.

## 29. Falling victim to the "foot in the door" technique

When someone makes a small request to get a "Yes" answer, and then follows up with a bigger request, people are more likely to agree to the big request than if only that request had been made.

## 30. Falling victim to the "door in the face" technique

When someone makes an outlandish request first, and then makes a smaller request, the initial outlandish request makes the smaller request seem more reasonable.

## 31. Focusing on the amount saved rather than the amount spent

For example, focusing on the amount of a discount rather than on whether you'd buy the item that day at the sale price if it wasn't listed as on sale.

### 32. Overvaluing things because they're yours

For instance, overestimating the price of your home when you put it on the market because you overestimate the added value of renovations you've made.

### 33. Failure to consider alternative explanations

Coming up with one explanation for why something has happened and failing to consider alternative, more likely explanations.

### 34. The self-serving bias

The self-serving bias is people's tendency to attribute positive events to their character but attribute negative events to external factors.

### 35. Attributing strangers' behavior to their character and not considering situational/contextual factors

### 36. Failure to consider opportunity cost

For example, spending an hour doing a low ROI task and thinking, "It's only an hour" and not considering the lost potential of spending that hour doing a high ROI task.

### 37. Assumed similarity

The tendency to assume other people hold similar attitudes to your own.

### 38. In-group bias

The tendency to trust and value people who are like you, or who are in your circle, more than people from different backgrounds.

### 39. "You don't know what you don't know"

Getting external feedback can help you become aware of things you didn't even know that you didn't know!

### 40. The tendency to underestimate how long tasks will take

### 41. The belief that worry and overthinking will lead to problem-solving insights

Overthinking tends to impair problem-solving ability and can lead to avoidance coping.

### 42. Biased implicit attitudes

Psychologists use a test called the implicit association test to measure attitudes that people subconsciously hold. Results show that people subconsciously associate "fat" with "lazy", for instance.

It's useful to be mindful that you may subconsciously hold biased attitudes; then, you can consciously correct them.

### 43. The peak-end rule

The tendency to most strongly remember

- how you felt at the end of an experience
- how you felt at the moment of peak emotional intensity during the experience.

Biased memories can lead to biased future decision-making.

#### 44. The tendency to prefer familiar things

Familiarity breeds liking, which is part of why people are loyal to certain brands and may pay inflated prices for them instead of switching.

#### 45. The belief you can multitask

When you're "multitasking," you're task and attention-shifting. Trying to focus on more than one goal at a time is self-sabotage.

#### 46. Failure to recognize the cognitive benefits of restorative activities and those that increase positive emotions

For example, seeing humor or breaks as a "waste of time".

#### 47. Positively biased predictions

For example, expect that if you sign up for a one-year gym membership, you will go—even though this hasn't been the case in the past.

#### 48. Cheating on your goals based on positive behaviors you plan to do later

For example, overeating today if you expect you'll be starting a diet next week. Often, the planned positive behaviors don't happen.

49. Repeating the same behavior and expecting different results or thinking that doubling down on a failed strategy will start to produce positive results

For example, believing that if you nag more, your partner will change.

50. "I can't change my behavior" or "I can't change my thinking style"

Instead of telling yourself "I can't," try asking yourself how you could shift your behavior (or thinking style) by just five percent.<sup>51</sup>

Can you relate to some of these? Write down your top three most common cognitive distortions.

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### **Reflecting on My Thoughts: Cultivating Gratitude**

When we start observing our thoughts it can lead to a change in our thoughts. Are your thoughts supporting

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<sup>51</sup>Alice Boyes, Ph.D. 50 Common Cognitive Distortions: A giant list of ubiquitous cognitive distortions. Psychology Today. [www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/in-practice/201301/50-common-cognitive-distortions](http://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/in-practice/201301/50-common-cognitive-distortions). January 17, 2013.



your goals in life? Are they Christ-like since believers have the mind of Christ?

Here is an exercise from chapter three:

- Set a timer on your phone for 10 minutes. After it goes off answer the question, "What was I thinking?" Jot down each of your thoughts.
- Now get even more focused on your thoughts by setting your timer for 2 minutes. Close your eyes and listen to your thoughts.

"Thank God in everything no matter what the circumstances may be; be thankful and give thanks, for this is the will of God for you who are in Christ Jesus." (1 Thessalonians 5:18)

List someone for whom you feel a deep sense of gratitude toward.

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2. Create a list of the positive qualities you admired in this person that were genuinely helpful to you or others.

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3. Review the list you created and select a few key qualities for which you want to express your gratitude the next time you have the opportunity to connect with them.

By consistently practicing gratitude, we can change our brains. Thankfulness reduces symptoms of depression, alleviates anxiety, and relieves stress. Gratitude has also been shown to improve relationships, increase resilience, and improve overall health and well-being.

“Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good; His love endures forever” (1 Chronicles 16:34).

Consider the blessings God gives to you each day. The sunrise painting the sky, the breath that fills your lungs, the warm or cool air against your skin, the joy of a moment spent with a loved one, even the comfort of a soothing cup of coffee or tea.

Followers of Jesus Christ are called to a life of joy and rejoicing.

“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice” (Philippians 4:4)!

The Biblical definition of “rejoice” (chairō): to be cheerful, be well:—farewell, be glad, joy(-fully), rejoice.<sup>52</sup>

One particular aspect of this definition stood out to me, “be well”. Our wellness is connected to our rejoicing which is derived from Jesus.

Another passage in Scripture tells us the remedy for when we are not well and it involves rejoicing too. James 5:13-14 says: “Is anyone among you (afflicted) in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise. Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord.”

According to James, we have three different human experiences listed, affliction (trouble), happiness, and sickness. A list of two bad things and one great thing. Nobody suffers from the ailment of being too happy.

What James is doing is he is giving the prescription for the problems that would plague us and make us unwell (which include afflictions, and sicknesses). Sandwiched between the two ailments is the prescription for our well-being, “let them sing songs of praise”. James also includes prayer and anointing oil.

Being merry comes as we are fully persuaded that God’s promises are true for us. If you believe that what God’s Word says is true- you are going to sing in celebration of what that means for your life. Faith is saying yes to the Lord who heals.

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<sup>52</sup><https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g5463/niv/mgnt/0-1/>

## Rejoicing in Jesus

Our joy and our rejoicing are tied directly to Jesus. According to Commentary Critical and Explanatory of the Whole Bible- Oil in the East, and especially among the Jews was a sign of the divine grace (James 5:14).<sup>53</sup> The oil serves as a reminder during my prayers of who my Healer is—the One to whom I bring my situation.

This is the role of the Holy Spirit within me as I pray. It is all about the grace of Jesus Christ who bore our infirmities and by His stripes we are healed. Rejoice always in Him, especially in times of trouble, for your rejoicing will bring wholeness and health to your body.

There are a multitude of Biblical examples of how rejoicing is linked to Jesus.

- “When they saw the star, they were overjoyed” (Matthew 2:10). The star led them to the Messiah who was born in Bethlehem.
- “Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in Heaven” (Matthew 5:12). Without Jesus none of us would ever enter into Heaven (Revelation 21:27).
- “He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of His birth” (Luke 1:14). This is speaking of the birth of John the Baptist. The question is what about him would cause joy? John was the forerunner of Christ, his

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<sup>53</sup><https://www.studyight.org/commentaries/eng/jfu/james-5.html>

mission was to demonstrate Jesus as the source of eternal life.

- “But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found” (Luke 15:32). This is from the story of the prodigal son which gives us a picture of God’s love for us which can be seen through the sacrifice that Jesus made.
- “Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing My day; he saw it and was glad” (John 8:56). Abraham’s faith looked forward to the Promised One -Jesus Christ.
- “But I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy” (John 16:22). Seeing Jesus produces joy.
- “When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing” (Acts 8:39). The eunuch just received the salvation of the Lord and the result was rejoicing as he went.
- “Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth” (1 Corinthians 13:6). Jesus is the Truth (John 14:6).
- “But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when His glory is revealed” (1 Peter 4:13). Once again rejoicing is tied directly to Jesus, in this case, His glory revealed.
- “It has given me great joy to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as the Father commanded us” (2 John 1:4). John has joy in those who are walking in Jesus. Another way of saying this is that they are being doers of the

Word (James 1:22), their lives are in tune with God's Word, and they are receiving and continuing in God's Word.

- "Let us rejoice and be glad and give Him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and His bride has made herself ready" (Revelation 19:7). Jesus has chosen us to be His bride, and this causes us to rejoice. "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to Himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless" (Ephesians 5:25-27).

All of these verses remind us that our rejoicing is in Jesus. We can rejoice at all times and worship God in Spirit and truth because we have "gained a surpassing victory through Him who loved us" (Romans 8:37b).

We gain some more insight into the instruction to "rejoice always" when we study the context of the passages of 1 Thessalonians 5:16 and Philipians 4 even further.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18: "Rejoice Always. Pray without ceasing. Give thanks in every circumstance, for this is God's Will for you in Christ Jesus." 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 is the greatest and most simple instruction for prayer. When should I pray? Always! How should I pray? Rejoicing always and giving thanks in all circumstances!

Praying without ceasing does not mean that we need to continue to ask God for the same things over and over again or that the amount of time spent in prayer equates to whether or not we receive the answer we are seeking. The starting point for our prayers is thanksgiving or rejoicing. The starting point to our prayers is knowing that because of Jesus, your heavenly Father loves you and delights to give good gifts to you, His child. If you know this and believe this you will want to pray all the time and your life will be filled with great joy- a life of rejoicing in Jesus.

Philippians 4:4 says: "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!"

Joy is a choice. Renewing our minds is a deliberate choice we make and the result of filling our minds with God's precious promises will cause us to rejoice. The other option is to disregard God's Word and cast doubt on His promises by opting not to rejoice, by declining to pray in alignment with God's will, and by refusing to find our greatest satisfaction in Jesus Christ. Your joy cannot be taken away by anyone or anything. This is why even in prison Paul maintains such abundant joy.

Your greatest responsibility is to rejoice in the Lord always and to not worry about your past failures, your present circumstances, and your future challenges! Why? It's because of the transformative power of God's grace in your life. Instead of dwelling on worries, which can adversely affect our well-being, there's an alternative: prayer. It's wonderful what happens when Christ displaces worry at the center of your life (Philippians 4:6-7).

“In everything by prayer with thanksgiving let your requests be known to God.” “With thanksgiving” The Greek word used for “with” is (meta) and it means after.<sup>54</sup> “After thanksgiving, then let your requests be made known to God.” Thanksgiving is “eucharistia”<sup>55</sup> where we get communion or eucharist from.

Before making your requests known, worship God for all the spiritual blessings you have in Jesus. By praying in this manner, you liberate yourself from being fixated on whether or not your prayers will be answered according to your desired timing or method. The more you express gratitude to Him, the more His peace will rule in your heart. Whatever concerns you, bring it to your Father in prayer and walk the path of peace through thanksgiving. Remember, joy isn’t dependent on external circumstances, but it stems from the fact that Christ resides within me and has bestowed upon me His righteous life (Galatians 2:20).

Prayer is an essential, beautiful, and important part of our worshipping God through talking and meeting with Him in His presence.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup>[www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g3326/niv/mgnt/0-1/](http://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g3326/niv/mgnt/0-1/)

<sup>55</sup><https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g2169/niv/mgnt/0-1/>

<sup>56</sup>Dr. Matthew Webster. *The Evolution of Worship: From the Garden to the Gates of Heaven*. Kindle Direct Publishing. 2022.



Small Group Questions  
Chapter 5 Cultivating Emotional  
and Spiritual Well-Being

1. Reflecting on the list of 50 common cognitive distortions, consider how recognizing these patterns might impact your daily life and interactions. Which distortions do you find most relatable or prevalent in your thinking? Take a moment to identify the top three distortions that you believe influence your thoughts and behaviors the most, and consider how becoming aware of them could contribute to your personal growth and well-being.

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2. How can we integrate the practice of gratitude into our daily lives to cultivate positive thinking patterns and enhance our overall well-being? Write down 5 blessings you experienced during the week to share with the group. Remember the blessings that God gives you each day, from the beauty of nature to the joy of spending time with loved ones. Embrace a life of joy and rejoicing, knowing that faith and gratitude



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4. In what ways can we practically cultivate a spirit of rejoicing in our daily lives, even amidst challenges and difficulties?

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5. Consider the instruction to "pray without ceasing" and to "rejoice always". How can we integrate these principles into our prayer lives, and what impact might it have on our overall spiritual well-being?

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## Part IV: Living in Wholeness



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## Chapter 6

### Embracing Total Well-Being: Body, Mind/Soul, and Spirit



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<sup>58</sup>[www.alchemybodyandsoul.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Mind-Body-Spirit.jpg](http://www.alchemybodyandsoul.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Mind-Body-Spirit.jpg)

## **Three Parts of Man: Body, Soul, and Spirit**

Some people do not know that we are made of three parts: body, soul, and spirit. This is identified in 1 Thessalonians 5:23: "May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." It's important to note that the term "soul" is often used interchangeably with "heart" or "mind."

In the Greek definition of heart "kardia," we learn why it would be used interchangeably with soul: Heart is "the soul or mind, as it is the fountain and seat of the thoughts, passions, desires, appetites, affections, purposes, endeavors."<sup>59</sup> The heart is the inward self where feelings, emotions, and thinking occur.

Soul "psyché" is the seat of the feelings, desires, affections, and aversions (our heart, soul, etc.).<sup>60</sup> What this means is that the soul encompasses the entire inner being of a person, including the mind, will, and emotions. Our soul is divided into three parts: our mind (intellect), our emotions (feelings), and our will (decision-maker). The soul of man is our ego, personality, character, and disposition. Your soul is what makes you uniquely you.

Mind "nous": the mind, comprising alike the faculties of perceiving and understanding and those of feeling, judging, and determining.<sup>61</sup>

Spirit is (pneuma) meaning the Holy Spirit or one of three parts of a person (a life-giving spirit).<sup>62</sup> What I

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<sup>59</sup>[www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g2588/niv/mgnt/0-1/](http://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g2588/niv/mgnt/0-1/)

<sup>60</sup><https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g5590/niv/mgnt/0-1/>

<sup>61</sup>[www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g3563/niv/mgnt/0-1/](http://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g3563/niv/mgnt/0-1/)

believe this to mean is that worship is both through the Holy Spirit and that it also takes place in our spirit. Our spirit is the place where we find communion with God.

Spirit is where life comes from. "Then the LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground (created our body) and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being" (Genesis 2:7). Notice how a body without a spirit does not have any life. This is evident when a person dies, the spirit leaves the body and there is no more life.

We know that there is a divide between soul and spirit as Hebrews 4:12a declares, "For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit."

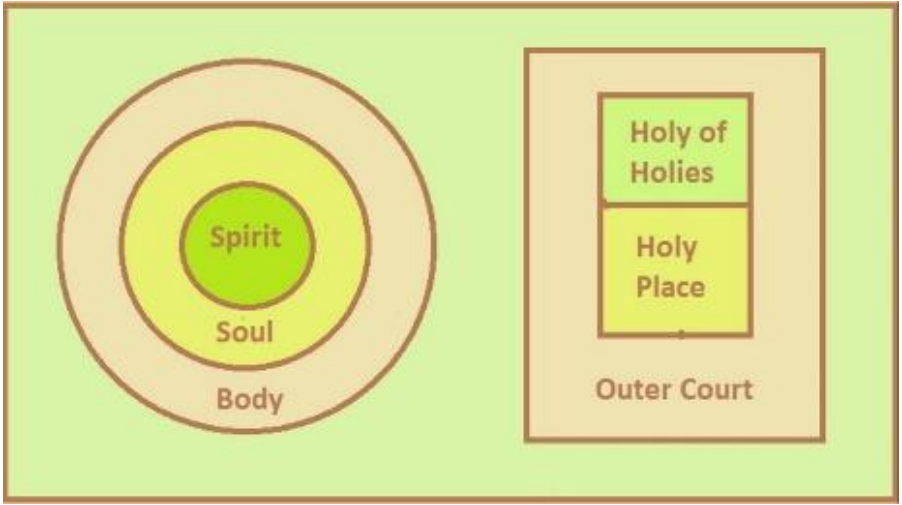
We also learn in Scripture from Mary the mother of Jesus, "My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior" (Luke 1:46-47). In this case, Mary's feelings, and her mind caused her to magnify or celebrate the Lord which resulted in her spirit rejoicing.

To better understand the three parts of man we need to look to the Old Testament Tabernacle. In the old tabernacle of Moses, you find there are three parts to it. The outer court would represent your body. The Holy Place, which is your soul. And then the Holy of Holies, where the Ark of the Covenant is found, God's presence and glory were found there. That's the spirit.

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<sup>62</sup><https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g4151/niv/mgnt/0-1/>





Through Jesus' fulfillment of the Law (Matthew 5:17, John 19:30), we now have a spirit to Spirit connection with God (John 4:23-24). Our walk and our worship have become intimate with God as our Father in the New Covenant.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20: "Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore, honor God with your bodies."

Numerous believers feel defeated because they strive to earn God's blessings through their actions. It's crucial to grasp that relying solely on self-effort will deprive you of reigning in life by God's grace (Romans 5:17). Salvation, healing, and prosperity cannot be earned through personal striving. If the greatest miracle—salvation and spiritual renewal through Jesus—emanates from grace and faith in Him, not from works, then how much more do lesser miracles,

like physical healing, financial provision, and restored relationships, also flow from the same source?

“But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ —by grace you have been saved, and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:4–6).

### **Discovering God’s Will**

Do you know what God’s will for you is? Did you know we find the answer in the same verse that tells us to renew our minds? So, it is evident that knowing God’s will is a key component of renewing our minds.

“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—His good, pleasing and perfect will” (Romans 12:2).

Paul would write to the church of Ephesus and tell them, “Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is” (Ephesians 5:17).

The Greek word for “will” (thelēma) is

1) the purpose of God is to bless mankind through Christ,

(and/or)

2) of what God wishes to be done by us.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>63</sup>[www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g2307/niv/mgnt/0-1/](http://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g2307/niv/mgnt/0-1/)

Knowing God's will to bless you in Christ will dispel your worries, fears, doubts, and insecurities.

### **What We Are to Meditate On**

Our minds are renewed as we put our minds on Christ. This is what Philippians 4:8 tells us to do but most do not realize that the list of what we are to dwell on is a picture of Christ who is our life.

"Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things" (Philippians 4:8).

One of the most important questions that I like to first ask whenever someone has come in to seek counsel is, "What's on your mind?". When casually asked the question, we might not give it much thought. How often do we pay attention to what thoughts have been ruminating in our minds? Do your thoughts throughout the day fill you with hope, bring you joy, and cause you to rejoice in God? Or have your thoughts caused you to worry, fear, stress, and have sleepless nights?

The Apostle Paul wrote: "For though we walk in the flesh [as mortal men], we are not carrying on our [spiritual] warfare according to the flesh and using the weapons of man. The weapons of our warfare are not physical [weapons of flesh and blood]. Our weapons are divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying sophisticated arguments and every exalted and proud thing that sets itself up against the [true] knowledge of God, and we are taking every

thought and purpose captive to the obedience of Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:3-5 AMP).

The Apostle Paul says that our job in this battle is to "destroy strongholds."

According to the text in 2 Corinthians 10:3-5, a stronghold refers to any argument, mindset, or belief system that opposes the knowledge of God and exalts itself above the truth of Christ. Examples of strongholds could include:

1. False ideologies or philosophies that deny the existence or sovereignty of God.
2. Persistent doubts or fears that hinder one's faith and trust in God.
3. Addictive behaviors or sinful habits that enslave individuals and hinder walking in the Spirit.
4. Prideful attitudes or arrogance that resist submitting to God's authority and guidance.
5. Cultural norms or societal pressures that contradict Biblical principles and lead people away from God.

In essence, strongholds are anything that exalts itself against the knowledge of God. Your weapons for this warfare are found in the truth of God's Word, and they are mighty and have the power to overthrow and destroy every stronghold that has been built up through disinformation and wrong believing. And the way we can destroy these strongholds in our mind is by "bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ".

In most teachings I've encountered regarding 2 Corinthians 10, the emphasis on Paul's teaching was

often misplaced. When negative thoughts persisted, a sense of failure would arise providing fertile ground for the devil to intensify mental oppression, stress, and guilt. Paul is advocating for maintaining a focus on Christ's obedience. By consistently directing our thoughts toward Christ, we wield a potent weapon against the devil's strongholds in our minds. This is what it means to take every thought captive to obey Christ. Simply put your thoughts on Jesus, and when the enemy tries to condemn you, use it to put your mind on Christ even more. "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1).

Put your mind on Christ's obedience and what that means for us since in Him we have become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21). When we go to Philippians 4:8 it is important to know the Greek word for "think" is a metaphor which means to pass into one's account.<sup>64</sup> So when we get to this list of what we should think about I want you to know that if you are a believer in Jesus Christ these things have already been passed into your life's account.

"Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things" (Philippians 4:8).

The entire list that Paul is delineating represents the character of Christ. Direct your thoughts towards Christ's obedience and contemplate what it signifies for you. Let's explore together the blessings we possess in Jesus as a result of our union life with Him.

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<sup>64</sup>[www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g3049/kjv/tr/0-1/](http://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g3049/kjv/tr/0-1/)

- 1) True (alēthēs) means true and it is everything agreeable to the Scriptures of Truth. This is Jesus (John 14:6). Jesus answered, "I am the Way and the Truth and the Life." We have the truth of God's Word revealed as the Word became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14) and so we can demolish the stronghold lies the enemy tells us with the truth of Scripture.
- 2) Noble (semnos) to be venerated for character—Christ as our example. "To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in His steps (1 Peter 2:21). Christ will bear fruit in our lives because of our connection to Him (John 15). One of the fruits of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22 is peace. We can have a mind of peace because we have the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16).
- 3) Right (dikaios) means righteous which is Christ. 2 Corinthians 5:21 states, "God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God." You have the righteousness of Jesus, think about that when you pray. "The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective" (James 5:16b).
- 4) Pure (hagnos) pure from every fault, immaculate. "For we do not have a High Priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have One who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet He did not sin" (Hebrews 4:15). Because of this sinless life and sacrifice on our behalf, we have been made pure. "It is because of Him that you

are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption” (1 Corinthians 1:30). “And the blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from all sin” (1 John 1:7b).

- 5) Lovely (*prophilēs*) acceptable and pleasing to God. “And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Hebrews 10:10). “While He was still speaking, a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is My Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased. Listen to Him” (Matthew 17:5). Jesus is acceptable and pleasing to God and because you are in Christ - you are pleasing and acceptable to God, nothing more nothing less.
- 6) Good Repute (*euphēmos*) sounding well (a good name). “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under Heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). “That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in Heaven and on Earth and under the Earth” (Philippians 2:10). You have been adopted into God’s family- you are a child of God.
- 7) Excellence (*aretē*) is moral goodness. “Why do you call me good?” Jesus answered. “No one is good—except God alone” (Mark 10:18). Jesus said in John 10:30 “I and the Father are one.” This means that Jesus is morally excellent.

If you're familiar with Hebrew numerology, you've likely heard that the number seven symbolizes completion and perfection. Therefore, one might assume that God, through Paul's writing, was deliberately providing a comprehensive and flawless list of what we should contemplate. However, Paul includes not seven, but eight things.

What is the significance of eight? Eight is the Hebrew number for life. True life comes from the combination of grace and wisdom (chokhmah).<sup>65</sup> There are eight things listed to dwell on because the wisdom of God's grace (Jesus) is life. Think about such things.

8) Worthy of Praise (épainos) means praise.

"Through Jesus let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise" (Hebrews 13:15). The Psalmist asks, "Who is worthy of our praise?" "The Lord is great and worthy of our praise; no one can understand how great He is" (Psalm 145:3).<sup>66</sup>

"Whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things." "Think about such things" means take an inventory of and meditate on it. Know what has been passed into your life's account in Christ. Take an inventory of what Christ has done and meditate on it over and over, this is what it means to renew our minds.

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<sup>65</sup>The Letter Chet. [www.hebrew4christians.com](http://www.hebrew4christians.com)

<sup>66</sup>The entirety of the Greek words and definitions for Philippians 4:8 can be found at [www.blueletterbible.org/niv/phl/4/8/t\\_conc\\_1107008](http://www.blueletterbible.org/niv/phl/4/8/t_conc_1107008)



God's Word tells us, "The just [righteous] shall live by faith" (Romans 1:17). Another way of saying Romans 1:17 is that the righteous shall live by right believing. When you have right believing, you release the power of God to live right. The next time you have negative thoughts, catch yourself and look toward the obedience of Christ. See the cross. See Jesus. See what He died to give you- you are now pure in Him, you have His righteousness, and you are acceptable to God.

As we approach Jesus, who embodies the Word of God, allow Him to provide you with rest and speak words of grace over you as His words saturate your mind. As you increasingly receive His grace and gain a deeper understanding of His completed work and your righteousness in Him, you'll witness the chains of fear and discouragement breaking away. Strongholds will be dismantled. God desires to fill your mind with fresh, impactful, and redeeming thoughts. Replacing a thought requires another thought. Replacing a wrong belief necessitates a right belief. You require God's truth to replace the enemy's lies that have held you captive. You cannot eradicate negative thoughts just by using willpower. God's Word tells us, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6-7).

Replace your thoughts of worry with thoughts of His pure, immeasurable, and unconditional love for you. Turn your cares into prayers by casting all your cares to Him as you meditate on how He truly cares for you (1 Peter 5:7). Don't hold on to your worries any longer. Keep meditating on His promises for you in His Word. Thank your heavenly Father that because of

Jesus, you have a blood-bought right to have a mind free of worries and stress today. "For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline" (2 Timothy 1:7).

Small Group Questions  
Chapter 6 Embracing Total Well-Being:  
Body, Mind/Soul, and Spirit

1. How does understanding the distinction between the body, soul, and spirit impact your perception of yourself and your relationship with God?

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2. Reflecting on 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, what practical implications does it have for honoring God with our bodies? How does this concept align with the understanding of our bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit?

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## Chapter 7

### Embracing the Journey of Renewal



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Embracing the journey of renewal, particularly the profound transformation of the mind, is a sacred invitation to partake in the wondrous journey of spiritual growth and rejuvenation. Rooted in timeless Biblical principles, this journey is not a burdensome chore but a joyful revelation of divine grace and empowerment. It is an opportunity to shed the shackles of old thought patterns and embrace the liberating truth of God's promises. As we immerse ourselves in the renewing power of Scripture, prayer, and fellowship, we discover that mind renewal is not merely a task to be checked off a list, but a joyous awakening to the limitless possibilities of what a life lived receiving God's love and provision will look like. It is a journey of discovery, where each revelation of truth illuminates our path with newfound clarity and purpose. With hearts open to receive, we surrender our doubts and fears, allowing the transformative work of the Holy Spirit to renew our minds and restore our souls through time spent with God. In this sacred journey, we find solace, strength, and abiding joy, knowing that we are continually being transformed into the likeness of Christ, one renewing thought at a time.

Experiencing limbic system dysfunction makes it easy to turn everything negative and not even realize that you are doing it. Even with something as simple as receiving a compliment from another person your thoughts can turn negative. "You're such a great parent", can lead to negative thoughts of "If only they knew how many of my child's events I've missed they wouldn't think that." We can start to wonder, "Why did they say that? Do they truly believe I'm a good



parent? Did you notice their tone? They don't think I'm a good parent." It is easy to go down this destructive negative thought pathway turning everything into a stressor.

We have to change how we perceive what's going on in our minds. So don't wait until you're fully healthy to start having thoughts of good health. Think greater than you feel. Our heavenly Father should be fully trusted with our lives.

### **Speaking God's Word Over Your Life**

The Scriptures unequivocally highlight the profound influence our words possess, emphasizing their ability to shape the course of our lives towards either positivity or negativity. Proverbs 18:21 succinctly encapsulates this truth, stating, "Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit." This verse underscores the significant impact our speech wields. If we continue dwelling in destructive negative thought patterns how could we possibly expect to experience good health in our minds and bodies?

The words we choose when aligned with the promises of God, have life-changing power. Practice speaking God's Word rather than speaking about how you feel based on the negative circumstances you face. Because God's Word fosters faith (Romans 10:17), listening to His Word nurtures confidence in His love for you, and His unwavering faithfulness to His promises will alleviate your anxieties and fears.

As a believer in Christ under the New Covenant, you hold the esteemed position of a king-priest, endowing you with a twofold measure of speaking authority. Scripture reveals that in Christ, you are an integral

part of His royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9), indicating the significant authority inherent in your words as both a king and a priest. The Bible emphasizes the unique power vested in the declarations of these two groups (kings and priests). A king's utterance carries tremendous weight, backed by unparalleled authority, as stated in Ecclesiastes 8:4 (NLT), "Since a king's word is supreme, who can say to him, 'What are you doing?'" Additionally, priests, through the authority vested in their words, can settle disputes and assaults, as illustrated in Deuteronomy 21:5. If you find yourself in need of unmistakable transformation in your circumstances, God's Word assures that employing the immense power of your words, embodying your position as a part of a royal priesthood, will bring resolution in alignment with His promises.

Here are some key statements to speak over your life and the accompanying verses they come from:

1. I am kept in perfect peace because my mind stays on God and I trust in Him.

"You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You" (Isaiah 26:3).

2. I serve a God who exceeds my expectations and works powerfully within me.

"Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us" (Ephesians 3:20).

3. I am God's masterpiece, created in Christ Jesus for good works.

“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10).

4. I have the peace of God that surpasses all understanding.

“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:7).

5. I am chosen, royal, and set apart by God. I proclaim His excellence as I walk in His marvelous light.

“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9).

6. God has given me this day and I will rejoice and be glad in it.

“This is the day the Lord has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it” (Psalm 118:24).

7. God has given me spiritual armor that protects me and renders the enemy’s attacks against me ineffective.

“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes” (Ephesians 6:10-11).

8. My past mistakes do not define me; in Christ Jesus, I am free from all condemnation.

“So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1).

9. I am a child of God because I have received Him and believed in His name.

“Yet to all who did receive Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God” (John 1:12).

10. I am strong and courageous because the Lord my God goes with me.

“Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the Lord your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you” (Deuteronomy 31:6).

11. Through faith, I am justified and at peace with God.

“Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1).

12. I am a new creation in Christ.

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

13. I am more than a conqueror through Him who loves me.

"In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us" (Romans 8:37).

14. I am fearfully and wonderfully made.

"I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are Your works; my soul knows it very well" (Psalm 139:14).

15. I am known by God.

"I am the good shepherd. I know My own and My own know Me" (John 10:14).

16. I am set apart for God's purposes.

"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart" (Jeremiah 1:5a).

17. I can do whatever God calls me to do through Christ who strengthens me.

"I can do all things through Him who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13).

18. I can approach God with confidence and find the help I need.

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

19. I am forgiven and set free from sin.

"For He has rescued us from the dominion of

darkness and brought us into the Kingdom of the Son He loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Colossians 1:13-14).

20. God has given me everything I need today.

"And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of His glory in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19).

21. My sorrows will be turned into joy.

"Very truly I tell you, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy" (John 16:20).

22. God rescues me from any trouble that this day brings.

"Though I walk in the midst of trouble, You will revive me; You will stretch out Your hand against the wrath of my enemies, and Your right hand will save me" (Psalm 138:7).

23. God is my refuge and strength.

"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble" (Psalm 46:1).

24. God heals my wounds and broken heart.

"He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds" (Psalm 147:3).

25. I am filled with the Holy Spirit.

"And Peter said to them, 'Repent and be baptized

every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38).

26. My work for the Kingdom is never in vain.

“Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain” (1 Corinthians 15:58).

27. I am called to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ.

“And He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and proclaim the Gospel to the whole creation’” (Mark 16:15).

28. I am living by faith, not by sight.

“For we live by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7).

29. I am God’s co-worker.

“For we are co-workers in God’s service; you are God’s field, God’s building” (1 Corinthians 3:9).

30. I belong to a Kingdom that cannot be shaken. My treasure in Heaven will not spoil.

“Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a Kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe” (Hebrews 12:28, see also Matthew 6:20).

31. I am a citizen of Heaven.

“But our citizenship is in Heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ”  
(Philippians 3:20).

32. I am complete in Christ.

“So you also are complete through your union with Christ, who is the head over every ruler and authority” (Colossians 2:10).<sup>68</sup>

During the height of my physical challenges, I wrote the book called, “Overflowing Grace: 100 Blessings to Unleash Your Divine Inheritance and Unveil the New You.”<sup>69</sup> I highly recommend getting a copy of the book on Amazon or at [www.acts433.com/shop](http://www.acts433.com/shop). Begin each day by filling your mind with who you are in Christ and what spiritual blessings you have in Him.

Here are 15 statements about your identity in Christ.

1. “I am fearfully and wonderfully made, created in the image of God.”
2. “I am deeply loved by God, and nothing can separate me from His love.”
3. “I am forgiven and redeemed through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.”
4. “I am a child of God, chosen and adopted into His family.”
5. “I am filled with the Holy Spirit, who empowers me to live a life of purpose and significance.”
6. “I am a vessel of God’s grace, called to share His

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<sup>68</sup>32 Christian Affirmations for a Positive Outlook and Strong Faith. Therapy for Christians. [www.therapyforchristians.com/blog/christian-affirmations](http://www.therapyforchristians.com/blog/christian-affirmations) March 21, 2020.

<sup>69</sup>Dr. Matthew Webster 100 Blessings to Unleash Your Divine Inheritance and Unveil the New You. Kindle Direct Publishing. 2023.



love and truth with others.”

7. “I am not defined by my past mistakes or failures; I am defined by God’s grace, mercy, and love.”

8. “I am strong and courageous because God is with me, guiding and strengthening me.”

9. “I am chosen and appointed to bear fruit that will last, bringing glory to God.”

10. “I am equipped with everything I need to fulfill God’s purpose for my life.”

11. “I am an overcomer through Christ who gives me strength.”

12. “I am blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ and have access to His abundant provision.”

13. “I am called to walk in faith, knowing that God has a plan and purpose for me.”

14. “I am a light in the world, shining with the love and truth of Jesus Christ.”

15. “I am confident in God’s promises, knowing that He who began a good work in me will carry it on to completion.”

These affirmations remind believers of their identity, worth, and purpose in Christ, reinforcing a positive self-image and encouraging faith-filled living. They serve as reminders of God’s love, grace, and power at work in their lives, empowering them to live boldly and authentically as followers of Jesus Christ.

### **Positive Statements to Reflect on During Life’s Trials**

- God will enable me to be able to do this.
- God has led me to successfully do this in the past and He will enable me to do it again.
- No trial, tribulation, or suffering will last forever.
- Feeling bad doesn’t prevent me from receiving the grace I need.

- There is value in taking my time and going slowly.
- I might feel this way because of my past experiences of going through a dark valley, but the Lord is leading me to green pastures.
- I have the mind of Christ and I will dwell on the victory He is bringing to my life.
- I will choose to dwell on whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy, which is Jesus Christ.
- This is difficult and uncomfortable, but it's only temporary and God will use it for my good.
- I can learn from this and it will become easier next time.
- God will use this to produce in me perseverance and endurance (James 1:2-4) and will refine and shape my character leading me to a deeper hope (Romans 5:3-5) and growth in spiritual maturity (James 1:4).

It's so easy to get stuck where we're at. Sometimes it seems like some of our habits and behaviors are just the way we are, but our brains can change. If you have had social anxiety, you can change that. If you see yourself as a person with a negative outlook, you can change your negative thinking patterns. We can change our words, we can change our emotions, and we can allow the Holy Spirit to bear the fruit of Jesus and reflect the beauty of Christ. Embracing the journey of renewal from a Biblical perspective involves several key principles and practices that are rooted in faith and trust in God's transformative power. Here are some Biblical ways to embrace this journey:

1. Surrender to God's Will: Surrendering our lives to God and His will is foundational to the journey of renewal. This involves acknowledging our need for God's guidance and allowing Him to lead us on the path of transformation. As Romans 12:2 states, "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—His good, pleasing and perfect will."

2. Seeking God's Word: Regularly immersing ourselves in God's Word is essential for renewing our minds and aligning our thoughts with His truth. Psalm 119:105 says, "Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path." By meditating on Scripture and allowing it to dwell richly in us (Colossians 3:16), we gain wisdom and guidance for our journey of renewal.

3. Prayer and Communion with God: Maintaining a vibrant prayer life and cultivating a deep, personal relationship with God are vital aspects of the renewal process. Through prayer, we communicate with God, pour out our hearts to Him, and seek His strength and guidance. Philippians 4:6-7 encourages us, "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."

4. Walking in Faith: Embracing the journey of renewal requires stepping out in faith and trusting God's promises, even when circumstances may seem daunting. Hebrews 11:1 reminds us, "Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see." As we walk by faith and not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7), we allow God to work in and

through us to bring about transformation.

5. Community: Surrounding ourselves with a supportive community of fellow believers who encourage us is essential for the journey of renewal. Hebrews 10:24-25 urges us, “And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”

6. Perseverance and Patience: Finally, embracing the journey of renewal requires perseverance and patience, knowing that God is faithful to complete the work He has begun in us (Philippians 1:6). Even in the face of obstacles and setbacks, we press on toward the goal, trusting in God’s unfailing love and provision.

In our journey of renewal, we gain confidence that God is at work in us, transforming us from the inside out according to His perfect will and purposes.

### **Active Surrender**

Some aspects of life fall within our control, while others lie beyond our grasp. Life’s challenges escalate when we attempt to rein in the uncontrollable. Certain beliefs and emotions hinder our ability to let go. Embracing surrender to God initiates the process of release. It’s crucial to discern that active surrender differs from mere resignation. Interestingly, surrendering ourselves to God paradoxically enhances our sense of control.

Make a list of the things you would like to surrender to God. These might include situations, experiences, memories, hurts, people, and other things that have been bothering you. Then spend some time in prayer

turning over each of the things on your list to God. Thank Him that you can “cast your cares upon Him because He cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7) and you don’t have to let those things negatively impact your life anymore.

What I am surrendering to God today:

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A reason Paul has so much peace and contentment is because he has an eternal perspective. To live a joyous life in this world, you have to have an eternal perspective and know that your trials are temporary.

2 Corinthians 4:17-18: “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are

temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.”

God instructed Joshua that to achieve success, he must meditate on the Law day and night (Joshua 1:8). Living under the Old Covenant, Joshua adhered to this directive. What should we glean from Joshua 1:8 since we live under the New Covenant?

We must interpret this passage through the lens of Jesus’ completed work. Thus, grounding ourselves in the unshakable foundation of the New Covenant of grace becomes crucial. Understanding that we are no longer bound by the Law, what is the New Covenant approach to experiencing blessings and success?

Joshua’s meditation centered on the Law since the New Testament had not yet been ushered in. For us, unlocking the secret to success lies in meditating on God’s Word within the context of the New Covenant of grace.

Before delving into the concept of meditating on God’s Word, let’s clarify the term “meditate.”

When Scripture speaks of meditation, it doesn’t denote a mere mental exercise. The Hebrew word for meditation in the Old Testament, “hagah,” implies uttering or muttering.<sup>70</sup> Therefore, to meditate is to speak quietly.

Take note of the Lord’s instruction to Joshua: “This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth.” It doesn’t say, “Let it not depart from your mind.” The

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<sup>70</sup>[www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h1897/niv/wlc/0-1/](http://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h1897/niv/wlc/0-1/)

essence of meditating on God's Word lies not in mental rumination but in verbalizing His promises!

"Does this mean I should repetitively recite God's Word? For instance, should I repeatedly say 'By His stripes I am healed' when seeking healing?"

Meditating on God's Word transcends mindless repetition. It involves a deep inner process. David encapsulated this essence when he declared, "My heart was hot within me; while I was musing, the fire burned. Then I spoke with my tongue" (Psalm 39:3).

As you meditate on God's Word, seek the Holy Spirit's fresh revelation of Jesus. Let the Scripture resonate with revelation in your heart. As you speak from that illuminated understanding, God anoints your words. When you proclaim, "By His stripes, I am healed," infused with a revelation of His love for you and faith in Jesus, your declaration carries power!<sup>71</sup>

God speaks to Joshua and says, "Be strong and courageous." Strong "chazaq" (grow strong).<sup>72</sup> In your fearful situation, God tells Joshua to "grow strong".

"Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the Law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful."

Courage is anchored by the Word of God (Joshua 1:7-8). Confidence comes in the finished work of Jesus. Proclaim the Word "Let it not depart from your

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<sup>71</sup> Joseph Prince. Meditate on God's Word. [www.josephprince.org/blog/daily-grace-inspirations/meditate-on-gods-word](http://www.josephprince.org/blog/daily-grace-inspirations/meditate-on-gods-word)

<sup>72</sup> [www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h2388/kjv/wlc/0-1/](http://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h2388/kjv/wlc/0-1/)

mouth”, in your fearful situation grow strong, anchored by the Word of God as you proclaim it over your fearful situations.

There is a key found in Joshua 1:9b. “Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.” Discouraged “châthath” means to be broken into pieces.<sup>73</sup> The opposite of being broken into pieces is to be whole. The salvation of the Lord brings us wholeness. The term “sozo,” found in Scripture, not only means salvation but also signifies wholeness. The “sozo” that our Lord Jesus offers encompasses complete healing for our body, soul/(mind), and spirit. This is the essence of true wholeness.

God’s instruction to Joshua isn’t merely to summon courage for the sake of bravery alone. Rather, the courage required stems from the profound assurance that the LORD your God will accompany you wherever you may go. Courage rests upon the assurance of God being with us in our battles (Joshua 1:5,9). Because God is with us, we can grow in strength when we are facing a frightening situation. God never calls us to do anything apart from Him, and in Him, we are kept safe and secure.

“The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to His heavenly Kingdom. To Him be glory for ever and ever. Amen” (2 Timothy 4:18).

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<sup>73</sup>[www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h2865/kjv/wlc/0-1/](http://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h2865/kjv/wlc/0-1/)



In this verse, Paul expresses confidence in the Lord's ability to deliver him from harm and bring him safely into His heavenly kingdom. This verse assures believers of salvation and the ultimate victory through Christ, who protects and preserves them until they are safely ushered into God's eternal Kingdom.

Instead of resisting your body's preparations to fight or flee, why not look for opportunities to work with that instinct and utilize your muscles in ways that will decrease the amygdala's activation? Brief periods of aerobic exercise can be very effective in reducing muscle tension. If you haven't been exercising regularly, please do consider potential risks. Consult your doctor before you begin, and increase your activity level gradually, not all at once. I highly recommend exercise as a strategy for reducing anxiety because, quite simply, it works. A variety of studies have demonstrated that aerobic exercise can ease anxiety. Reductions in anxiety are measurable after only twenty minutes of exercise.<sup>74</sup> That's less time than it takes for most medications to begin working.

The best type of exercise for you, both physically and mentally, is exercise that meets the following four criteria:

- You enjoy doing it.
- You'll keep doing it.
- It's moderately intense.

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<sup>74</sup>Johnsgard, K. W. 2004. *Conquering Depression and Anxiety Through Exercise*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.

- Your doctor approves it.

This means you should choose one or two types of exercise to engage in at least three times a week for thirty minutes each time.

Exercise Questions to Consider:

1. How frequently do you engage in physical activity each week, and what is the duration of each session?
2. Have you noticed a reduction in anxiety levels following exercise?
3. If you currently don't engage in regular exercise, would you be open to starting an exercise routine to help alleviate the activation of the sympathetic nervous system associated with anxiety?
4. What type of physical activity do you find most appealing or enjoyable?
5. Are there any specific barriers or challenges preventing you from incorporating regular exercise into your routine?
6. Have you previously experienced any positive effects on your mood or mental well-being as a result of physical activity?
7. Would you be interested in exploring different types of exercise or physical activities to find what works best for you?
8. How do you currently manage stress and anxiety in your life, and do you feel that exercise could be a beneficial addition to your coping strategies?

9. Are there any specific goals you have in mind related to physical fitness or overall well-being that you would like to achieve through exercise?

10. Have you discussed the potential benefits of exercise with a healthcare professional or therapist as part of your anxiety management plan?

Just as regular exercise plays a key role in managing anxiety and stress, it can also be a powerful factor in improving the quality of your sleep, which is essential for overall well-being.

### **Tips to Get Good Sleep**

- Go to bed and wake up at the same time every day.
- Create a relaxing bedtime routine to get your body and mind ready to sleep.
- Stop working on any task an hour before bedtime, and avoid talking about stressful or emotional issues in bed.
- Ensure that your sleeping environment is conducive to sleep. Make your bedroom dark, quiet, cool, and comfortable. Use earplugs or a sleep mask if you need to.
- Skip caffeinated beverages within 6 to 8 hours of bedtime.
- Don't smoke. Nicotine is a stimulant, which can keep you up.
- Avoid eating big meals close to bedtime -- especially spicy foods, which may cause heartburn.

- Exercise at least 20 minutes each day, but try to do it at least 4 hours before bedtime.
- Can't sleep? Read or listen to soft music. Skip the TV, tablet, and smartphone.
- Start a sleep diary to track what affects your rest.
- Move the computer and TV out of your bedroom so they don't distract you. Don't just swap in your tablet or phone to replace the TV.
- Make it a priority to get at least 7 hours of sleep every night.
- If you nap, keep it short (20-30 minutes) and not close to bedtime. Late-day naps can lead to sleepless nights.
- Use relaxing breathing techniques to prepare for sleep.
- Use your bed only for sleep and sex.
- Near bedtime, replace activating thoughts with relaxing ones.
- If you can't fall asleep after thirty minutes in bed, get up and do something relaxing.
- Stop drinking alcohol at least 3 hours before bed so it doesn't wake you up later.
- Consider moving your pet out of your bed, and maybe out of your bedroom.

- Wear sunscreen and spend time in the sunlight. But avoid bright lights close to bedtime.<sup>75</sup>

### **Evaluating Whether Sleep Challenges Are Negatively Impacting You**

Achieving quality, restorative sleep can frequently pose a challenge for individuals grappling with anxiety. When anxiety disrupts sleep, it's typically attributed to the influence of the amygdala.

The best approach to improving sleep is to take a careful look at your sleep-related routines to ensure they're healthy.

To assist in identifying potential sleep issues, review the following statements and mark any that resonate with you:

\_\_\_\_\_ I often feel drowsy, fall asleep, or nap during the day.

\_\_\_\_\_ I use medications or alcohol to help me sleep.

\_\_\_\_\_ I depend on caffeine to get me through the day.

\_\_\_\_\_ I don't go to bed or wake up at a consistent time.

\_\_\_\_\_ I awaken too early and can't get back to sleep.

\_\_\_\_\_ It often takes me more than twenty minutes to fall asleep.

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<sup>75</sup>Jennifer Robinson, M.D. Your Sleep Checklist. [www.webmd.com/sleep-disorders/your-sleep-checklist](http://www.webmd.com/sleep-disorders/your-sleep-checklist) November 17, 2022.

\_\_\_\_\_ I'm often restless and find it difficult to fall asleep when I go to bed.

\_\_\_\_\_ I dread trying to go to sleep at night.

\_\_\_\_\_ I need complete silence to sleep. Any noise will prevent me from relaxing.

\_\_\_\_\_ When I get out of bed in the morning, I don't feel rested.

\_\_\_\_\_ I don't sleep soundly. I just can't relax.

\_\_\_\_\_ I frequently experience vivid dreams or nightmares that disrupt my sleep.

\_\_\_\_\_ I wake up multiple times throughout the night and struggle to fall back asleep.

### **Do I Have Sleep Apnea**

Sleep apnea is a potentially serious sleep disorder characterized by interrupted breathing during sleep. Sleep apnea is dangerous because it disrupts the normal sleep pattern, leading to reduced oxygen levels in the blood and frequent awakenings throughout the night. This disruption in breathing can have several negative consequences for overall health such as:

1. **Decreased Oxygen Levels:** Sleep apnea causes breathing to stop periodically during sleep, leading to drops in blood oxygen levels. This can strain the cardiovascular system and increase the risk of heart disease, high blood pressure, and stroke.

2. **Fragmented Sleep:** Individuals with sleep apnea experience frequent awakenings throughout the night, even if they're not fully aware of them. This fragmented sleep pattern can lead to excessive

daytime sleepiness, difficulty concentrating, and impaired cognitive function.

3. **Increased Stress Response:** The repeated awakenings due to breathing interruptions trigger the body's stress response, leading to increased levels of stress hormones like cortisol. Over time, this chronic stress response can contribute to a variety of health problems, including weight gain, mood disorders, and immune system dysfunction.

4. **Cardiovascular Problems:** Sleep apnea is associated with an increased risk of cardiovascular problems such as hypertension (high blood pressure), arrhythmias (irregular heartbeats), coronary artery disease, and heart failure. The fluctuations in oxygen levels and the strain on the heart from disrupted sleep can contribute to these issues.

5. **Metabolic Disorders:** Sleep apnea has been linked to metabolic disorders such as insulin resistance and type 2 diabetes. Disrupted sleep can affect the body's ability to regulate blood sugar levels, leading to insulin resistance and an increased risk of developing diabetes.

6. **Weight Gain:** There is a bidirectional relationship between sleep apnea and obesity. Excess weight, particularly around the neck, can contribute to the narrowing of the airway, making it more susceptible to collapse during sleep. Conversely, sleep apnea can disrupt hormones that regulate appetite and metabolism, leading to weight gain or difficulty losing weight.

7. **Decreased Quality of Life:** The combination of excessive daytime sleepiness, impaired cognitive

function, and increased risk of health problems can significantly impact an individual's quality of life. It can interfere with daily activities, work performance, and relationships.

Overall, sleep apnea is a serious condition that requires medical attention. Left untreated, it can have far-reaching consequences for both physical and mental health. Treatment options may include lifestyle changes, such as weight loss and positional therapy, as well as medical interventions like continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) therapy or surgery, depending on the severity and underlying causes of sleep apnea.

If you have been struggling mightily with low energy levels and an unfocused cloudy mind (brain fog) the reason might simply be that you are suffering from sleep apnea. It is best to rule this possibility out by making an appointment with your doctor. Once your sleep cycle is restored, the journey of renewing your mind and transforming your entire being will be much easier to accomplish.

### **S.H.A.R.P.- Bringing Positive Thinking into Focus**

We tend to focus on what fits with how we feel. If we are depressed, we focus on the negative – which makes us feel even worse. If we are critical or hate ourselves, we focus on our mistakes and shortcomings. It's like wearing gloomy glasses– we see things through distorted and dark lenses, rather than as things are. We need to break the gloomy cycle by changing our focus. Noticing the positives with S.H.A.R.P. glasses will improve the way you think and feel.

Let's bring positive thinking into focus by using the



acronym S.H.A.R.P.

**S**et time aside each day to notice the positives - perhaps a few minutes at the same time of day, or set a reminder alarm 3 times during the day to be thankful and praise God for the blessings you have in your life.

**H**unt down those times that went well, when you said or did something positive, or when something positive happened or was said to you. Don't dismiss things as being too small or insignificant! Sometimes, just smiling or speaking a few words, can have a big impact.

**A**cknowledge when some things didn't go so well – it's normal to feel sad or disappointed - but ask if you're still looking at your situation only from a negative viewpoint. Use your S.H.A.R.P. glasses and ask yourself: What did I do ok? What is there about that situation that was ok? What can I learn? What can I do better next time?

**R**ecord every day, write down at least 3 positive things that happened each day - use a positive data log or positive journal app. You could also use a notepad, a file on your computer, or write on colored pieces of paper and put them in a jar. You can review your written record every week, month, and at the end of the year.

**P**lan for the next day. Plan positive things, things you can look forward to and that you enjoy doing.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>76</sup>Carol Vivyan. SHARP Specs Notice the Positives.  
[www.getselfhelp.co.uk/sharp.htm](http://www.getselfhelp.co.uk/sharp.htm). 2016.

## **Challenging Our Beliefs**

Beliefs are very important. Our beliefs have either been learned, or they've been developed through experience.

**Step 1: Identifying Erroneous Beliefs:** Begin by prayerfully reflecting on any negative or erroneous beliefs you may hold about yourself, God, or your circumstances. These beliefs may manifest as thoughts of unworthiness, fear, doubt, or inadequacy. Write down these beliefs as clearly and specifically as possible.

**Step 2: Biblical Truth Exploration:** Using a concordance or online Bible search tool, find Bible verses that directly counteract each erroneous belief you've identified. Seek out verses that affirm your identity in Christ, highlight His promises, celebrate His love for you, and showcase His power to transform your life.

**Step 3: Scripture Meditation and Affirmation:** Spend time meditating on each Scripture verse you've found. Reflect on its meaning and allow it to penetrate your heart and mind. Write down each verse and personalize it as an affirmation, using "I" or "my" to make it applicable to yourself.

**Step 4: Visual Representation:** Create visual reminders of these affirming Scripture verses. You could write them on sticky notes and place them where you'll see them regularly, create digital graphics with the verses, or even make artwork incorporating the verses.

**Step 5. Daily Practice:** Set aside dedicated time each day to review and meditate on these Scripture

affirmations. Repeat them aloud or silently, allowing them to sink deep into your subconscious mind. Pray for God's help in internalizing these truths and transforming your beliefs. This is a crucial step in renewing your mind in Christ.

**Step 6. Application and Reflection:** Throughout your day, pay attention to situations or thoughts that trigger your erroneous beliefs. In those moments, intentionally replace those negative thoughts with the corresponding Scripture affirmations. Reflect on how applying God's truth impacts your mindset and emotions.

**Step 7. Community Support:** Share your journey of renewing your mind with a trusted Christian friend, mentor, or small group. Invite them to pray for you as you work to replace erroneous beliefs with God's truth. This will encourage other brothers and sisters in Christ to renew their minds too!

By consistently practicing this exercise, you can gradually rewire your limbic system to align with the truth of God's Word, leading to greater emotional health, spiritual growth, and a deeper experience of the freedom you have in Christ.

It's important to show your limbic system and your body that healing is possible without relying solely on supplements or avoiding certain things. While supplements can be beneficial—especially those indicated by your bloodwork—they don't address the root causes of your issues. If you're dealing with limbic system dysfunction, supplements can only provide limited relief. I found that the more I focused on my symptoms, the more I slipped into fear-based

thinking, which only intensified my struggles. I realized that to see myself as a happy and healthy person, renewing my mind was the only way to do it.

How can I train my brain to see myself as God sees me in Christ? This comes as a result of allowing God's Word to build my faith. "Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ" (Romans 10:17).

As I focused on magnifying my heavenly Father and His immense love for me, I found myself minimizing my health challenges. "Magnify the LORD with me; let us exalt His name together" (Psalm 34:3). What happens when we magnify the Lord? Just continue reading. Psalm 34:4: "I prayed to the Lord, and He answered me. He freed me from all my fears."

Paul would write, "Don't be anxious about anything" (Philippians 4:6a). "Don't worry" (merimnáō): don't take thought.<sup>77</sup> Before a thought gets to the point of troubling you. Replace that thought with a better one (mind renewal). Any negative behavior you don't like about your life, challenge it and change it. If you have been dealing with anxiety for some time it helps to understand what part of your brain is causing it so that you can be empowered to address it and eliminate it from your life.

### **Evaluation of Anxiety Originating from the Left Hemisphere**

The left hemisphere of the cortex can generate a form of anxious apprehension characterized by a propensity to fret about future outcomes and engage in repetitive

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<sup>77</sup>[www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g3309/kjv/tr/0-1/](http://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g3309/kjv/tr/0-1/)

problem-solving. Individuals experiencing this type of anxiety often find themselves ruminating or fixating intensely on a situation, or feel compelled to discuss it repeatedly. Review the examples below and select those that resonate with you:

\_\_\_\_\_ I often think about situations from the past and consider ways they could have gone better.

\_\_\_\_\_ I tend to get stuck in the process of considering different ways I could talk to someone about concerns or other topics.

\_\_\_\_\_ Sometimes I just can't turn off a stream of negative thinking, and it often prevents me from sleeping.

\_\_\_\_\_ I rehearse potential problem situations in my mind, considering various ways things could go wrong and how I'll react.

\_\_\_\_\_ I feel much better when I have a solution for a possible difficulty, just in case the situation arises.

\_\_\_\_\_ I know I tend to dwell on difficulties, but it's just because I'm trying to find explanations for them.

\_\_\_\_\_ I find it comforting to consider a problem from several different perspectives.

\_\_\_\_\_ I have difficulty getting myself to stop thinking about things that make me anxious.

\_\_\_\_\_ I often feel overwhelmed by worries about future events and struggle to stop thinking about them.

\_\_\_\_\_ I frequently replay past conversations or events in my mind, trying to analyze and find solutions to perceived problems.

### **Focusing on Our Left Hemisphere**

The left hemisphere of the brain is often associated with logical thinking, analytical processing, and language. Calming this hemisphere can help reduce stress, promote relaxation, and enhance overall well-being. Here are some ways to help calm the left hemisphere:

1. **Scripture Meditation:** Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly (Colossians 3:16). Observe your thoughts and demolish strongholds of negative thinking patterns with the Word of God. Speak God's Word over your life.
2. **Deep Breathing Exercises:** Practice deep breathing techniques such as diaphragmatic breathing or box breathing. Deep breathing activates the body's relaxation response, calming the mind and reducing stress levels.
3. **Progressive Muscle Relaxation:** Perform progressive muscle relaxation exercises, where you systematically tense and then relax different muscle groups in the body. This can help release physical tension and promote a sense of calmness.
4. **Spending Time in Nature:** Enjoy the beauty of God's creation by immersing yourself in natural settings like

parks, forests, or gardens. Nature has a calming effect on the mind and can help shift your focus away from analytical thinking. Take off your shoes and ground your body to the Earth—this simple act of connecting with the ground can enhance your sense of well-being. Grounding, or earthing, helps to balance your body's energy, reduce stress, and promote feelings of peace. It allows you to reconnect with the present moment, fostering a deeper sense of gratitude and connection to the world around you. Embrace the soothing power of nature.

5. Artistic Expression: Engage in creative activities such as drawing, painting, or writing poetry. These activities tap into the other hemisphere of the brain, promoting relaxation and self-expression.

6. Listening to Music: Listen to calming music or sounds that evoke positive emotions and relaxation. Music has the power to influence mood and can help quiet the mind. Listening to worship music is always a great choice.

7. Visualization: Practice guided imagery or visualization exercises that transport you to peaceful and serene environments. Imagining yourself in a tranquil setting can help quiet the analytical mind and promote relaxation. I recommend using the visualization exercise I wrote earlier in the book that invites Christ into your situation with you, providing comfort and peace.

8. Journaling: Write in a journal to express thoughts and emotions, allowing the left hemisphere to process information in a structured way. Journaling can help reduce stress and promote self-awareness.

9. Mindful Walking: Take mindful walks, focusing on each step and observing the sensations in your body and the environment around you. Walking mindfully can help quiet the mind and promote relaxation.

By incorporating these practices into your daily routine, you can help calm the left hemisphere of the brain, reduce stress, and enhance overall well-being.

### **Evaluation of Anxiety Originating from the Right Hemisphere**

The right hemisphere of your cortex enables you to employ your imagination to envision events that are not presently happening. However, when you visualize stressful scenarios, you may unintentionally trigger an anxiety response within your body. This evaluation aims to ascertain whether the right hemisphere commonly contributes to your anxiety. Please review the following statements and mark any that you frequently experience:

\_\_\_\_\_ I frequently find myself envisioning negative outcomes or worst-case scenarios in various situations.

\_\_\_\_\_ I often imagine potential criticisms or rejections from others and how they might affect me emotionally.

\_\_\_\_\_ I picture potential problem situations in my mind, imagining various ways things could go wrong and how others will react.

\_\_\_\_\_ I can almost always imagine several scenarios that illustrate how a situation could turn out badly for me.



\_\_\_\_\_ I tend to imagine ways that people will criticize or reject me.

\_\_\_\_\_ I often imagine ways that I might embarrass myself.

\_\_\_\_\_ I'm very attuned to the tone of people's voices.

\_\_\_\_\_ I rely on my intuition to know what others are feeling and thinking.

\_\_\_\_\_ I sometimes see images of terrible events occurring.

### **Attending to the Right Hemisphere through Worship**

By far the most helpful of all exercises for right hemisphere anxiety is worship. By listening to music that brings joy, you directly stimulate your right hemisphere, promoting positive emotional responses. Additionally, singing can be beneficial as it activates the right hemisphere to a greater extent than speaking alone.<sup>78</sup> Purposefully incorporating music to elevate your mood, boost your vitality, and replace negative thoughts represents a powerful right-hemisphere strategy for combating anxiety.

### **What Worship Will Do for the Right Hemisphere**

1. Emotional Regulation: The right hemisphere of the brain is intricately involved in processing emotions. When the limbic system, which governs emotions, experiences dysfunction, it can lead to mood disorders

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<sup>78</sup>Jeffries, K. J., J. B. Fritz, and A. R. Braun. 2003. "Words in Melody: An H215O PET Study of Brain Activation During Singing and Speaking." *NeuroReport* 14:749–754.

and emotional instability. Worship music, with its melodies, harmonies, and lyrics, has a unique ability to resonate with the deepest emotions within us. It touches the soul in a way that few other stimuli can, helping to regulate emotions and restore balance to the limbic system.

2. **Stress Reduction:** Chronic stress can wreak havoc on the limbic system, contributing to anxiety, depression, and other mood disorders. Uplifting worship music has been shown to activate regions of the brain associated with relaxation and stress reduction. As individuals engage in worship, their bodies release endorphins and other neurotransmitters that promote feelings of peace and well-being, counteracting the detrimental effects of stress on the limbic system.

3. **Connection and Healing:** The right hemisphere of the brain is also involved in processing social and relational information. Dysfunction in this area can impair one's ability to connect with others and experience intimacy. Worship, however, fosters a sense of connection—not only with a higher power but also with fellow worshippers. As individuals come together in worship, they experience a profound sense of unity and belonging that can facilitate healing within the limbic system, promoting healthier relationships and emotional resilience.

4. **Spiritual Renewal:** Beyond its physiological and psychological benefits, worship offers a pathway to spiritual renewal and transformation. Engaging in worship allows individuals to transcend their immediate circumstances and connect with something

greater than themselves. This transcendent experience activates the right hemisphere of the brain in ways that foster a sense of awe, wonder, and spiritual insight.

In Matthew 4:10: Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only'" (Matthew 4:10).

Jesus quoted from the Old Testament but He made a New Covenant change for us. Jesus is quoting Deuteronomy 6:13: "Fear the LORD your God, serve Him only" (Deuteronomy 6:13a). But what Jesus said was: "Worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only" (Matthew 4:10).

Through this, Jesus shows that true worship is rooted in the reverence and veneration of God—what it means to truly "fear the Lord".

As individuals immerse themselves in worship, they open themselves up to divine healing and restoration, which can profoundly impact the health and functioning of the limbic system.

In essence, worship, particularly through uplifting music, serves as a powerful tool for nurturing and healing the limbic system, with a specific emphasis on the right hemisphere of the brain. By engaging in worship regularly, individuals can experience emotional regulation, stress reduction, relational healing, and spiritual renewal—all of which contribute to overall well-being and flourishing.

Here are some other exercises that help with right hemisphere-based anxiety:

1. **Focused Breathing:** Practice focused breathing exercises, such as diaphragmatic breathing or square breathing. These techniques involve slow, controlled breaths to engage the left hemisphere and promote relaxation.
2. **Structured Writing:** Engage in structured writing exercises, such as making lists or writing in a structured format like poetry or essays. This can help organize thoughts and feelings, promoting a sense of control and reducing anxiety.
3. **Logical Puzzles:** Solve logic puzzles, Sudoku, or crossword puzzles to engage the left hemisphere's analytical and problem-solving abilities. This can help distract from anxious thoughts and promote a sense of accomplishment.
4. **Mathematical Exercises:** Practice simple mathematical calculations or engage in mathematical puzzles to activate the left hemisphere and shift focus away from anxiety.
5. **Language-Based Activities:** Engage in language-based activities such as reading, writing, or learning a new language. These activities can stimulate the left hemisphere and promote cognitive engagement.
6. **Structured Planning:** Create structured plans or schedules for your day or week. Breaking tasks down into manageable steps and organizing your time can reduce feelings of overwhelm and anxiety.
7. **Journalling:** Write about your feelings and experiences in a structured journal format. This can help organize thoughts, process emotions, and gain perspective on anxious thoughts and feelings.

8. Mindfulness Activities: Engage in mindfulness activities that involve focusing on the present moment, such as mindful breathing or body scan exercises. This can help shift attention away from anxious thoughts and promote relaxation.

9. Physical Activity: Participate in physical activities that involve repetitive, structured movements, such as walking, swimming, or Pilates. Physical exercise can help reduce anxiety and promote overall well-being by engaging both hemispheres of the brain.

### **Recognizing Anxiety Stemming from Interpretations**

Our understanding of events, circumstances, and others' reactions can precipitate feelings of anxiety. In such cases, it's the individual's cortex that's generating undue anxiety. This anxiety doesn't stem directly from the situation but rather from the interpretation crafted by the cortex. To discern if your cortex tends to transform neutral situations into anxiety triggers, review the following list and mark any applicable items:

If you check many of the statements in the list below, the interpretations offered by your cortex are likely exacerbating your anxiety.

\_\_\_\_\_ I tend to expect the worst.

\_\_\_\_\_ When I have trouble finding something, I worry that I'll never find it.

\_\_\_\_\_ I often dwell on past mistakes or perceived failures, replaying them in my mind.

\_\_\_\_\_ I find myself overanalyzing situations or conversations, trying to decipher hidden meanings or intentions.

\_\_\_\_\_ I have trouble accepting the fact that I make mistakes, and I beat myself up when I do.

\_\_\_\_\_ I have a hard time saying no because I don't like to disappoint people.

\_\_\_\_\_ I think I take people's comments too personally.

\_\_\_\_\_ When someone makes a suggestion, I can't help but consider it a criticism.

\_\_\_\_\_ I tend to focus on any flaws in my appearance.

\_\_\_\_\_ When I have a setback, I find it overwhelming and feel like giving up.

\_\_\_\_\_ I tend to expect the worst.

### **Evaluating Anticipatory Anxiety**

When you engage in anticipation, you're using your cortex to think about or visualize upcoming events. If these events seem likely to have negative outcomes, anticipation can amplify feelings of anxiety. Similar to anxiety that arises from left hemisphere activity, this anticipation can lead to worries about scenarios that may never occur. Furthermore, even if the event does happen, you might find yourself dwelling on it long before it occurs or merits concern. As a result, instead of experiencing the event just once, you may relive it

repeatedly in your thoughts beforehand. Below are some statements that reflect a tendency toward anticipation. Please review the list and mark any that resonate with you:

\_\_\_\_\_ If I know a potential conflict is looming, I spend a lot of time considering it.

\_\_\_\_\_ When I know that something might go wrong, it's constantly on my mind.

\_\_\_\_\_ I frequently find myself preoccupied with potential future events or outcomes, even if they are relatively minor.

\_\_\_\_\_ If I'm going to have to perform or speak in front of a group, I can't stop thinking about it.

\_\_\_\_\_ I can almost always think of several ways that a situation could turn out badly for me.

\_\_\_\_\_ I think about things that people might say that would upset me.

\_\_\_\_\_ If there's a potential for danger or illness, I feel like I need to consider it.

\_\_\_\_\_ I experience heightened anxiety when considering uncertain future circumstances, often imagining worst-case scenarios.

\_\_\_\_\_ I can be worried sick about something months before it occurs.

\_\_\_\_\_ I often waste time thinking of solutions for problems that never occur.

If you've identified with multiple statements above, you might find yourself excessively dwelling on

distressing scenarios, thereby elevating your anxiety levels. While your left hemisphere may be seeking solutions, an intense fixation on potential challenges can trigger the amygdala. Consequently, you could be overlooking numerous opportunities for moments devoid of anxiety by ruminating on hypothetical problems that may never materialize.

### **Evaluating Your Pessimistic Dispositions**

Understanding the influence of your cortex can be as simple as reflecting on your overall perception of yourself, the world, and the future. One of the cortex's key functions is to interpret experiences and anticipate future outcomes. Your general outlook plays a significant role in this cognitive process. Some people tend to be optimistic, expecting positive outcomes, while others may have a more pessimistic perspective, anticipating negative results. Pessimism is often linked to increased anxiety, as those with a negative outlook are less likely to believe in successful outcomes, which can diminish their motivation to confront their anxiety. This assessment is designed to help you identify negative, pessimistic thought patterns. Please review the statements below and mark any that resonate with you:

\_\_\_\_\_ When I have an upcoming presentation or examination, I worry about it quite a bit and fear I won't do well.

\_\_\_\_\_ I generally expect that if something can go wrong, it will.



\_\_\_\_\_ I'm often convinced that my anxiety will never end.

\_\_\_\_\_ When I hear that something unexpected has happened to someone, I typically imagine it's something negative.

\_\_\_\_\_ I frequently prepare myself for negative events that I fear will occur but seldom or never do.

\_\_\_\_\_ If it weren't for bad luck, I wouldn't have any luck at all.

\_\_\_\_\_ Some people want to improve their lives, but that seems pretty hopeless to me.

\_\_\_\_\_ I often find myself dwelling on past failures or disappointments, believing they are indicative of future outcomes.

\_\_\_\_\_ I tend to view setbacks or obstacles as insurmountable, feeling discouraged or defeated by them.

\_\_\_\_\_ I struggle to maintain a positive outlook, often anticipating negative outcomes in various aspects of life.

\_\_\_\_\_ Most people will let you down, so it's best not to expect much.

Optimism is more associated with left hemisphere activation, whereas pessimism is associated with the

right hemisphere.<sup>79</sup> The right hemisphere is more focused on identifying threats and what can go wrong, so increased activation in the right hemisphere is associated with more negative evaluation. Deliberately attempting to take a positive view of a situation has been shown to activate the left hemisphere which is evidence that a pessimistic attitude can be modified.<sup>80</sup>

In this comprehensive guide, we've embarked on a transformative journey to renew our minds and embrace the abundant life that Christ offers. Starting with a solid foundation grounded in Biblical insights and an understanding of the mind-body-spirit connection, we've explored the powerful concept of neuroplasticity and its significant implications for faith and cognitive transformation. We've delved into practical steps for renewal, identifying negative thought patterns, examining triggers, and equipping ourselves with faith exercises to strengthen our spiritual muscles.

From managing stress and anxiety to nurturing emotional and spiritual well-being, we've cultivated holistic approaches to health, recognizing the interconnectedness of body, mind, and spirit. As we face obstacles and trials, we are empowered to build resilience through faith and persistence, celebrating every step of progress along the way. With a steadfast commitment to this journey of renewal, we move forward in wholeness and abundance, trusting in God's

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<sup>79</sup>Hecht, D. 2013. "The Neural Basis of Optimism and Pessimism." *Experimental Neurobiology* 22:173–199.

<sup>80</sup>McRae, K., J. J. Gross, J. Weber, E. R. Robertson, P. Sokol-Hessner, R. D. Ray, J. D. Gabrieli, and K. N. Ochsner. 2012. "The Development of Emotion Regulation: An fMRI Study of Cognitive Reappraisal in Children, Adolescents, and Young Adults." *Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience* 7:11–22.

promise to complete the good work He has begun in us.

## Small Group Questions

### Chapter 7 Embracing the Journey of Renewal

1. How can we practically implement the principles of positive self-talk and scriptural affirmation in our daily lives to combat negative thought patterns and cultivate a mindset rooted in God's truth and grace?

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2. How can we practically integrate these affirmations about our identity in Christ into our daily lives to foster a mindset of positivity and faith? Which statement resonates the most with you right now in this season of your life?

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3. What steps can we take to actively surrender our worries, fears, and struggles to God, trusting in His guidance and provision for our journey of renewal and transformation?

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6. Reflecting on the exercises provided, how can we challenge and reshape our thought patterns to alleviate anxiety and promote emotional resilience? Discuss practical strategies such as Scripture meditation, deep breathing exercises, and engaging in worship to address both left and right-hemisphere-based anxiety.

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