

How  
*The Difference-Maker*  
Lifts You Above  
Depressive Thoughts

**PLUS**

*Practical Exercises*

By Nancy Virden

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[www.suicide.org/international-suicide-hotlines.html](http://www.suicide.org/international-suicide-hotlines.html)

If you are suicidal with a plan and intent, *immediately* call 911  
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For more international emergency numbers:  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_suicide\\_crisis\\_lines](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_suicide_crisis_lines)

# About the Author

## Nancy Virden

Nancy is a mental health advocate, freelance writer, and founder and voice of Always the Fight Ministries.

Always the Fight Ministries has been displaying compassion for those fighting mental illness, addiction, and abuse since 2012. Nancy openly shares her story of emotional resurrection from despair.

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Nancy has two adult sons. Her hobbies include art and research.



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*Dedicated with love to Sue G., a friend of thirty-three years, who without fail has prayerfully been at my side - nonjudgmentally, uncritically, with full acceptance and loving action - through dark and scary waters, always ready to greet me when I return to health and without stigma, treat me with knowledge and grace.  
Thank you, dear friend.*

A donation to Grace Alliance is appreciated in exchange for this free book.

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It is grace made practical for our mental and emotional health and resiliency!

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No donations benefit Nancy Virden financially.

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# 1

## *The Difference-Maker*



We closed the meeting, said goodbye, and headed toward our cars. A full to-do list along with a sense of anxious helplessness filled my thoughts. *I can't! I can't do it all!*

Walking was treacherous. Potholes marked the parking lot, evidence of years of pounding storms and heavy traffic. Miniscule pebbles sprinkled a disordered hopscotch as if large rocks had been pulverized over patches of old and newer asphalt.

*“I can’t”  
becomes  
our miracle*

Randomly, my mind wandered. Even if I wanted to clean-up the millions of bee-bee size stones, it would be an unsafe waste of hours. A less tedious walk would be nice, but the problem was not mine to fix. My job was simply to do my best at staying upright.

Finally, at home I slumped into a chair in silence, heart and thoughts racing in stride. There, still wrapped in my coat, hands and feet dressed for the winter chill, I sagged under the weight of barren strength. It was a familiar feeling, being overwhelmed.

Nothing was left of me on which to lean. The whole of my efforts lately seemed to accomplish nothing toward higher goals. Defeat

and exhaustion forced surrender. “God, I’m sorry, I can’t…”

*I can’t finish what we started, can’t move from this chair, can’t plan another meeting, see anyone, or write another paragraph. I can’t.*

Heaven sent three words to complete my whispered prayer, “but You can.” The parking lot had been an object lesson. It was time to set down what was not mine to fix.

“I can’t but You can,” became a regular confession. One step after another, this phrase called attention to the One whose strength does not wither, whose love never fails, and whose offers of rest and healing are constant.

*The Lord will  
fight for you.  
You need only  
be still.*

*Exodus 14:14*

“The Lord will fight for you. You need only be still,” God told Moses.<sup>1</sup>

“Come to me all you who are weary and carry heavy burdens.” Jesus promised, “I will give you rest.”<sup>2</sup>

Beyond burn-out, daily life often feels gravelly and threatening when, paralyzed by the past, insecurities, and depressive thinking, we make little progress toward personal wholeness.

Much of the time we stay stuck in fear of losing what is familiar, what it is we think we have learned to control. We chase pebbles instead of purpose.



“Let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think,” wrote Paul, one of the earliest believers in the Christian faith.<sup>3</sup> His term *changing*, or *renewing*, means to make an exchange.

God is on our side. “I can’t” becomes our miracle when we add, “The Difference-maker can, and I’ll let him.”

## **What does God have to do with it?**

“Who would you rather trust? He is the Difference-Maker.”  
- a psychologist

We like whats. What time is it? What is the score? What will happen next? Education, science, financial security, religion, and psychology to name a few, have their purposes. From them we may experience a sense of fulfillment and some answers to our question, *what?*



Each are temporary. Not only do they fluctuate with discovery, opinions, moods, and the market, none reach into our deepest need and make us permanently whole.

The Difference-maker is, well, different. Not a what, but a who, he does not change like shifting shadows<sup>4</sup> nor can he be chained to human personality, knowledge, or man-made rites or rules. He is greater than everything we call finished.

God’s nature is to be there for us, faithful to keep his promises even in troubling times. His nature is constant which gives us



hope and firm ground in which to stake our trust.

Because of his love for each of us, he made a way to spend forever with us. He is holy, without any deceit or darkness at all.<sup>5</sup> We are not, as we all know.<sup>6</sup> To permit our guilt (deceit, darkness) into his holy presence he had to make a sacrifice.

Instead of compromising his holy nature, he provided a holy (no deceit, no darkness) gift that we can choose or refuse. One day, we will all stand before God with or without his gift. When we come to him bearing this gift, we will be ushered into his heaven.<sup>7</sup> The news is dreadful for those who do not have the gift with them.<sup>8</sup>

The gift is free salvation, offered by God's grace, through faith in his Son Jesus.<sup>9</sup> It is by accepting this gift that we become God's children, and heirs to everything in his kingdom!<sup>10</sup>

We have this wonderful future with God to anticipate, yet he is with us now. He has sent his Spirit, the Holy Spirit (again, no deceit, no darkness) to teach us, and to touch us emotionally with spiritual truth.

One of the best gifts we can open today is God's peace. "The Lord gives his people strength; the Lord blesses them with peace"<sup>11</sup> Peace is our new state of being as we learn to apply his truth through his processes.

Paul said it best when he wrote the following.

When I think of all this, I fall to my knees and pray to the Father, the Creator of everything in heaven and on earth. I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources he will empower you with inner strength through his Spirit. Then

Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him. Your roots will grow down into God's love and keep you strong.

And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is. May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God.<sup>12</sup>

**He is with us during depression** You, LORD, hear the desire of the afflicted; you encourage them, and you listen to their cry. [Psalm 10:17niv](#)

**He cares about broken hearts** He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds. [Psalm 147:3niv](#)

**God is love** If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God. And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. [1 John 4:15-16niv](#)

**He offers inside-out change** I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. [Ezekiel 36:26niv](#)

**God's power is at work** 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, to him be glory...! [Ephesians 3:20-21niv](#)

**He offers eternal hope** I say to myself, "The LORD is my inheritance; therefore, I will hope in him!" -Jeremiah [Lamentations 3:24](#)

**He offers joy** I came that they may have and enjoy life, and have it in abundance -Jesus [John 10:10amp](#)

This is not a *God will fix you* book. It is a door that opens into the discovery of biblical solutions you may not know exist.

This is also not a miracle-cure book. The miracle is the Difference-maker, and how he lifts you above depressive thoughts.



## Prayer to the Difference-maker

*Lord, you teach:*

*“... 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.”  
Help me Lord, to change my  
depressive thoughts.*

Based on Philippians 4:8

## Practical Exercise 1: Make the Exchange

Have you ever walked past your bed and thought, *I could use a nap* even though a minute earlier you were not tired? This is a type of thought-habit. By mentally associating sleep with the bed, the visual automatically triggers ideas of exhaustion and rest.

Begin noticing what runs through your brain in different situations. How do certain thoughts make you feel?

If you are uncertain how to answer the last question, try this quick experiment: Think for 30 seconds on this year's news and notice your emotions. Now focus on your favorite memory for 30 seconds. In which direction did your feelings travel when you changed these intentional thoughts?

Ask God to help you identify the what, when, with whom, where, and why of an unwanted, unintentional thought-habit. Take the time to complete the following exercise (for each thought habit) and you will be surprised at the worthwhile outcome.

- 1. What consistent triggering event and response do you experience?**

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(Example: Your mood drops when you sit on the edge of the bed)

- 2. What are you thinking during this triggering event?**

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(Example: *Work is stressful.*)

### 3. What is your thought-habit?

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(Example: Associating this seat with going to a stressful job)

### 4. What thoughts would you prefer at these moments?

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(Example: *I feel content.*)

5. **Make the exchange.** The goal is to exchange your trigger's association from gloomy to what generally, brightens your mood.

**A. Change the environment.**

(Example: Redecorate the area with things you love; move the bed; add light)

**B. Change the context.**

(Example: Use the edge of the bed regularly for foot rubs, positive journaling, saying prayers, or texting jokes to your friends. *Avoid texts from work or open them elsewhere*)

**C. Change the atmosphere.**

(Example: Lift the overall cheeriness of the space with open curtains, worship music, or a self-starting coffee maker.)



### 6. Make a quality decision for when you will start.

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(Example: *I will buy the coffee maker on my lunch hour today*)

## 7. What action will you take next time this triggering event occurs?

---

(Example: Say/write a gratitude prayer)


Preparation is key to managing depressive thoughts. More serious episodes of depression, anxiety, or other challenges may follow a pattern, or cycle. Ideas throughout the following chapters can help create new thinking patterns to replace negative thought habits.



## 2

# Self-Doubt

*Some thoughts: My judgment is questionable. Is this the right decision? Am I good enough? No one will take me seriously. I do not know if I am making a difference. Fears of rejection and failure are paralyzing.*



*H*er eyes climb sparkling windowpanes to the tenth floor as she stands, frozen, facing the entrance to an imposing office building. Audrey has researched this job opportunity for days. *Do I know enough?* Her binder is loaded with documents. *What did I forget?* Her attire is professional. *I should have worn those other shoes.*

A woman walks past carrying a briefcase. *She looks put-together. What if she is applying?* Audrey has recently earned a degree, the first in her family to finish college. *But it is only a bachelor's and I have no experience.* She catches her reflection in the glass doors. *I'm too young.*

Finally, Audrey caves. *What was I thinking? They will never hire me! This was a mistake. I'm going home.*

### **“Get Wisdom”**

[God's] still on the throne. And those of us who know him put our trust in him and him alone. I don't put my trust in



Washington, I don't put my trust in the United Nations, I don't put trust in myself, I don't put my trust in my money. I put my trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. When all the rest of it fails, and crumbles and shatters, He'll be there. - Billy Graham

Self-doubt traps us between fear and failure. Trusting God to show us what to do may seem contradictory to our goal of thinking for ourselves with confidence. Of course, we are not created conformists or robots.

Nonetheless, we cannot know more than we know! Reliance on God's wisdom means our judgment is not our only resource. Even when we do not know the where, what, why, or how of circumstances, we never have to question God's ability to lead.


“Get wisdom” is the challenge King Solomon of ancient Israel gave to his son. “Though it cost all you have, get understanding!”<sup>1</sup> I wonder if his urgency was inspired by the story of his parents, King David and Bathsheba.<sup>1.5</sup>

### **Get wisdom from believers who listen to the Holy Spirit**

King David took another man's wife, Bathsheba, and killed the man. God detested this terrible deed and David knew it. Drowning in lies and excuses, he lived in total denial.

Nathan the prophet listened to God's Holy Spirit and called David

*Reliance on  
God's wisdom  
means our  
judgment is  
not our only  
resource.*



out on his rationalizing. Truth hit David hard, and he broke down. His tears of grief were not only regret but repentance.

Repentance is a combination of sorrow over sinning (wrongdoing) against God and a turning away from those sins. David later wrote in such a way it is evident he changed direction. His prayer is one we can repeat:

“Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. Point out anything in me that offends you and lead me along the path of everlasting life.”<sup>2</sup>

Solomon became king remembering his father’s lessons. Above long life, riches, or military victory, he prayed for an understanding mind and discerning heart to know the difference between right and wrong.<sup>3</sup>

Growth and discernment are natural results of a sincere and disciplined relationship with Jesus. Age and many years in the church do not guarantee this. Spiritually mature believers have a deeper understanding of sound judgment because by constant practice, they have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.<sup>4</sup> There is much to be said for such experience!

A man thanked a boy for giving him directions, adding, “I’m the new pastor. Come to church

Sunday and I'll show you how get to heaven.”

The boy was skeptical. "Awww, come on. You don't even know the way around town!"

God promises, “I will... teach you in the way you should go.”<sup>5</sup> Like Nathan, God still appoints people who listen to the Holy Spirit to speak truth.

The better part of wisdom is admitting when we have reached the end of what we know, and humbly asking for directions.

### **Get wisdom from the Holy Bible**

God's Word is not merely words on paper. All Scripture is God-breathed, according to Paul.<sup>6</sup> None of it is false.

No prophecy or book in the Bible came from the writer's initiative or human understanding. There is but one author, God. People like Paul, who wrote profound letters, were moved by the Holy Spirit.<sup>7</sup>

Paul continues by saying the Bible is useful for correcting and training so servants of God (believers) will be thoroughly equipped for every good deed and ministry.<sup>8</sup> He strongly implies that without such correction and training, we will not have the necessary tools to do God's work.

Several hyper-religious hypocrites tried to trap Jesus with loaded questions.. In one incident Jesus replied, “Are you not in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God?”<sup>9</sup>

Jesus could not be tricked into a defensive position because he knew the Word of God intimately. He understood the heart of it

because he knew the Father so well. If we are not studying the book, we will find ourselves floundering. So often we leave ourselves vulnerable to the latest arguments and philosophies.

Saturating in the Bible, whether through reading, or audio, is how we learn who God is, how he relates to us personally and how to respond to him. Without this, we miss out on the power of God.



I recommend reading the Bible in large chunks. Headings, chapters, and verse numbers have been added by publishers to help us navigate and find specific passages; these markings do not exist in the original writings. Context and flow of meaning are richer without those divisions, so try to pretend they are not there.

As variations from reading, I enjoy the NIV dramatized version audio Bible and movies that directly quote New Testament books.

The Bible is also not published in chronological order. You may find it more fascinating and exciting to follow a chronological list of books and passages. These are easily found online.

### **Get wisdom from knowing God's will**

Self-doubt interrupts our ability to process, leaving us stranded in a place of pain, the valley of indecision. We want to know God's will for us, yet our prayers are mixed with fear and negative what-ifs.

Sam enjoys the pace of factory work. He is good with his hands and feels a sense of pride in a day's accomplishments. He holds no student debt, can leave his job at the factory, and is fully present for his family in the evenings.

Sam would be miserable managing the factory. After dealing with contractors and payroll and customers all day, he would return home uptight, business school loans still due.

If Sam were offered these jobs, what would you recommend for him? God is not the author of confusion.<sup>10</sup> Most of the time, he speaks through the obvious, and we can over-spiritualize things to the point they make no sense.

God made us with innate talents and gifts. He placed us in cultures among people who will help develop our likes and dislikes. Assuming we are not choosing to sin, we can make life choices based on what suits our unique qualities best.

If Audrey faces that office building knowing the job is one that will dry up her talents, then walking away is likely wise. Of course, God grows us within the challenging features of his calling. We tend to enjoy what we are successful doing, and skills increase with practice. Trying a new experience is an adventure.

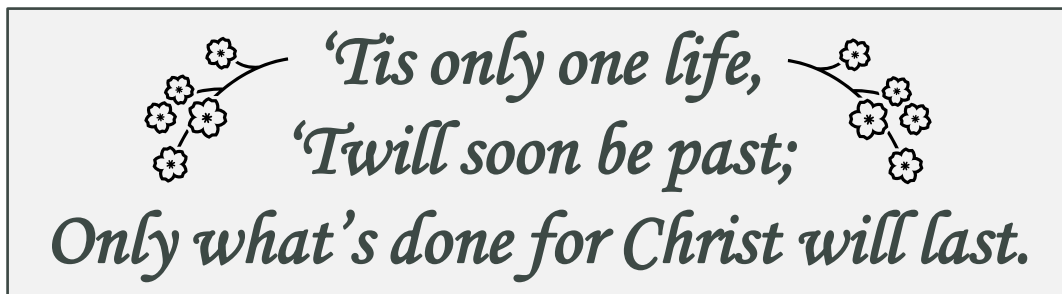


He has already revealed his will for us anyway. Comparing our options to his known will makes for simpler decisions; if they do not match, we need to change.

Firstly, we must have faith in God, and In his Son Jesus. Without faith it is impossible to please God because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.<sup>11</sup>

Secondly, with the help of the Holy Spirit we are to transform, becoming more like Christ in attitude which is love for others, obedience to the Father, and willingness to suffer for the truth.<sup>12</sup>

Thirdly, we are told to focus on the spiritual kingdom of Jesus.<sup>13</sup> My mother made a special birthday cake for me when I was young. Its message appealed to me as one who wanted to make a difference in the world. It speaks to me still.



God feels with you and knows how exhausted and overloaded you are at times. Do what you want and can do. His work in us is all about growing in love, not more pressure to meet human or religious standards.

### **Get wisdom from prayer**

Perhaps the most comforting promise about using good judgment

was recorded by Jesus' brother, James. "If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you."<sup>14</sup>

*Without finding fault*; what a relief! We do not have to clean-up before approaching our Holy Father. He has only one condition for his perfect guidance to get through to us. James wrote, "But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt."<sup>14</sup>

A pastor proposed an idea for knowing when we have received God's answer:

- Ask. Make a specific request to God such as "Is it best I take this job?" or "Do I owe Becky an apology?"
- Listen. Pay attention to the first thought that follows your request.
- Act. Go with that first thought.

*But I will make a mistake! I'll think of something wrong!* That is where doubt comes in. God is more than capable of getting his message through all the muck in our heads. Every time I have applied this pastor's idea, *every time*, the answer has been the right one.

Confusion comes with arguing. It is true. Trying to have my way and "ask" him at the same time forces a *did he answer or did he not answer* internal battle. That is on me, not him. Self-doubt will pop-up its ugly head, nevertheless, it loses its power if we refuse to second-guess God.

Faith and trust increase the better we know him. "Be still and know that I am God," he says.<sup>15</sup> Be still. Turn off the television and

*He told  
Moses his  
name,  
“I AM.”*

phone, go somewhere quiet and meditate on who is this God and Creator of the universe.

Open your Bible with this prayer. “God, please show me what this means to my life, my situation. Please reveal what I need to learn about You.”

Love and holiness are God’s nature. His love is unending. He is the source of all good and truth in the world. He is perfectly good.<sup>16</sup>

Yet he is a mystery. No one of such finite quality as we can fully make sense of an eternal God. The most studious experts of scripture know only what God has revealed to them.

He told Moses his name, *I AM*.<sup>17</sup> He exists! As compared to all the other false gods and idols that are man-made illusions, and self-reliance which is faulty, surely, he can handle our situations! Let us stop questioning our every move. We can be still and know he is God.

Imagine Audrey goes to the job interview, confident of God’s love for her. Intimidation and insecurities weaken as she exchanges self-doubt for faith.

I cannot; Lord, You can.  
I have not; You will never abandon me.  
I am unseeing; You know all.  
Please help me to follow you along the best path.





## **Prayer to the Difference-maker**

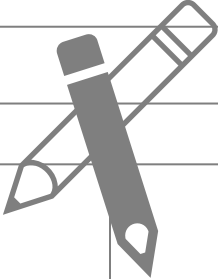
*Do good to your servant  
according to your word,  
Lord. Teach me knowledge  
and good judgment, for I  
trust your commands. Before  
I was afflicted, I went  
astray, but now I obey  
your word.*

**Psalm 119:65-67**

## Practical Exercise 2: Pros and Cons

Step one: Pray for God's guidance. Step two: Check the Bible or ask a mature follower of Christ to see if there is already an answer given. Step three: Be brutally honest with all the pros and cons of your options.

<b>If I Do...</b>	<b>If I Don't...</b>
<b>Pros</b>	<b>Cons</b>
<b>Cons</b>	<b>Pros</b>



*I will counsel you with my loving eye on you. – God*

## **Next, remember who has all the answers**

Place a dark-colored glass jar or bottle wherever it will catch some light. Keep it open and have slips of paper and pen available.

Write down your unanswered questions, doubts about yourself, and any other concerns.

Place them in the jar.

You will see a dichotomy. Inside the jar is a great problem surrounded by shadows and light. By faith we can accept that we do not see all or have all the answers. By faith we can know that God does.


Notice how rays of light sometimes shoot out of your jar. This represents the endless wisdom and love of God to which we can each cling. Somehow, good is going to come of what we do not understand.



# 3

## *Toxic Shame*

*Some thoughts: I must punish myself. I cannot show my face. I'll never tell anyone what I did or how I feel. There are dozens of reasons for her to hate me. I cannot go to God because I've done too much wrong. Forgive myself? Not possible.*



Shame is a good thing. It is! Without shame for wrongdoing, there would be no rehabilitation, no fresh starts, no amends, and no change. We must feel ashamed, so we are ready to apologize and mean it. This is healthy.

Toxic Shame is a relentless accuser with total-devastation potential. Scores of his targets have fallen victim to physical pains, anxiety, or some form of self-punishment. This shame prevents rest in God's love because we question our worthiness of forgiveness.



Toxic Shame is a cruel entertainer, replaying mental movies especially at night while we snack on the poisons of self-hate and humiliation.

Toxic Shame's co-conspirator is Mindreading. She makes it difficult to drop the fear that people remember and do not forgive mistakes.

We do not take their words of mercy at face value. Mindreading assumes we are judged by everyone like we judge ourselves.

### **Toxic shame cannot stand up to God's mercy**

Refusing to forgive ourselves might seem like humility, however, it is the epitome of pride. We assume to have an authority greater than God when, after he wipes away our sins, we answer, "Not me. I'm too messed up even for You."

Clumsy human attitudes such as this do not determine God's thoughts toward us.

My dad was not easily understood. His ways were a mix of good deeds and doling out grievous pain. Although he was once a pastor, I never heard him speak the name of Jesus.

As he lay dying and unresponsive at age eighty-four, a chaplain came to visit. He asked about Dad's background, and I told him what I just told you. The chaplain said something I had not considered. "Perhaps because he once was a pastor, he does not believe he can be forgiven for falling into sin."

*"Perhaps  
because he was  
once a pastor,  
he does not  
believe he can  
be forgiven."*



It makes perfect sense, the way Dad would shrug off talk of his old days as a preacher, or how he changed the subject if a regular conversation turned to faith. When I or my son asked about his relationship to Jesus, he always answered, "I'm working on it."

Shortly after the chaplain spoke to and prayed with my dad, I stepped out for a short break from keeping vigil. Ten minutes later, trying to reenter Dad's room, it felt the door was heavy, as if pressing against a strong wind. With a heavier shove, I found myself in a familiar and most welcome of atmospheres.

It was still except for the sound of labored breathing. The air was thick with the closest to perfect peace as we will ever know on this earth. A dense presence of God's Holy Spirit filled the room, concentrated in the corner over my father's bed.

The Difference-maker was answering a long-time prayer and holding a deathbed conversation with Dad. Some time passed until I felt the presence rise and leave, perhaps taking a refreshed soul with him. Within an hour, my dad's frail body quit trying.

Jesus was crucified between two thieves. One of them said to Jesus, "Remember me when you come into your kingdom."

Jesus answered, "Today you will be with me in paradise."<sup>1</sup>

A thief, and my dad. Two unlikely candidates for heaven, embraced for eternity because they said yes to forgiveness.

It is too bad my dad did not live a life of peace. We can. While we rehearse old scenarios, the Difference-maker forgives generously.



We duck our heads in shame; he wants to lift our chins.<sup>2</sup>

Once my dad had breathed his last, I asked God if he would assure me that dad said yes to him during their talk. I opened my Bible and

landed near the end of the Old Testament.

“You will not stay angry with your people forever, because you delight in showing unfailing love,” Micah the prophet wrote. “Once again you will have compassion on us. You will trample our sins under your feet and throw them into the depths of the ocean!”<sup>3</sup>

Do you see that? God *delights* in showing unfailing love. He was never about to let his child go into eternity without him. In the end, God orchestrated the timing so my dad would accept forgiveness and his daughter would have the privilege of learning just how deep is the love of God for those who believe on his Son.<sup>4</sup>

Imagine, he not only removes our shame; he personally has a great time doing so! He is eager to remove our fears, too.

I know my dad is in heaven just like I know the thief is there “For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.”<sup>5</sup>

### **Five steps**

Remember healthy shame? It becomes toxic when we allow it to rot unattended while we refuse to deal with complicated truth.

Things we ignore grow moldy and poisonous. This plays out in addiction, resentment, depression, anger, control issues, self-righteousness, and so much more.

God’s love and forgiveness are gracious and forever I will thank him for them. However, he does not take our stubborn and hard hearts

and soften them against our will. Five steps we can take will open us to his miracles.

## 1. Moral Inventory

Moral inventory shapes our understanding of ourselves, which in turn shapes our relationship with God. Some styles of inventory ask us to take a hard look at our character defects, and this can create a powerful sense of our need for God. Other styles of inventory encourage us to look not just at our shortcomings but at our strengths as well, and so the sense of need for God is not as strong. If we write according to the first style of inventory, we are more likely to enter in an intimate relationship with God. –James Ryan of the National

Association of Christian Recovery

A fearless inventory does not shy away from total honesty with God who knows everything anyway.<sup>6</sup> We do not have to fear God's rejection. He never expects perfection from humans because he knows how weak we are; he remembers we are only dust.<sup>7</sup>





Borrowed from the Oxford Group's Four Absolutes, we compare our honesty, purity, unselfishness and love to that of Jesus:

<p><b>Honesty.</b> 1 Peter 2:22 "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth."</p>	<p><b>Sexual Purity.</b> Hebrews 7:26 "[Christ Jesus] truly meets our need – one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners..."</p>	<p><b>Unselfishness</b> 2 Corinthians 8:9 "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich."</p>	<p><b>Love.</b> 1 John 3:16 "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us."</p>
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## 2. Confession

"Don't be impressed with your own wisdom. Instead, fear the LORD and turn away from evil. Then you will have healing for your body and strength for your bones."<sup>8</sup>

Who knew the Bible is so psychologically apt, eh?

The One who made us knows we need to unload shame and offers his listening ears. We share our moral inventory with him and ask him to remove all our sins.



This is an ongoing process. His forgiveness is complete, nonetheless, we will continue to act dishonestly, impurely, selfishly, and unlovingly at times.

A caution: Do not compare yourself against other people, only to Christ Jesus.



### **3. Amends (not excuses)**

“Open confession is good for the soul.” –Scottish proverb

Jesus said, “...if you are offering your gift at the altar (he meant in worship of God), and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.”<sup>9</sup>

That is how important making amends is to God. Confessing our wrongs to people we have hurt is a giant step toward our healing from toxic shame, and hopefully brings some sense of closure to them too. Unless contacting them would cause them more pain, we humbly admit what we did and apologize.

Forgiveness is theirs to give when and if they are ready, so we do not ask for it. Our forgiveness comes from above. Amends may not produce a healed relationship; we do it anyway and leave others to God.

### **4. Pray blessings for your enemies**

Jesus prayed for his enemies<sup>10</sup> as did Stephen, the first Christian martyr.

Stephen prayed for those who conspired to have him stoned to death.<sup>11</sup> While he was dying, he asked God to have mercy on his enemies. Saul of Tarsus stood among them.<sup>11.5</sup>

In the name of God, Saul of Tarsus zealously opposed Jesus' followers, hunting them down. Mercilessly, he tore families apart, dragging men and women believers to prison and voting for their deaths. He tried to force them to blaspheme, a criminal offense.<sup>12</sup>

God heard Stephen's prayer and had mercy on Saul. After his conversion, Saul changed his name to Paul. (Saul was a kingly name; Paul means little.)

For about thirty-five years, Paul served as missionary and church planter, willingly suffering the life he had imposed on others.<sup>13</sup> Eventually, he wrote half the New Testament of our Holy Bible today.

*As he was  
martyred, he  
asked God to  
have mercy on  
his enemies.*

Did Paul deserve God's grace? No way! That is the beauty of it; none of us do. Jesus never sinned and therefore had pure love for his enemies. By praying for our enemies, we recognize their humanity and ours. The largess of God's grace heals our soul.

## **5. Stay in the present**

Paul could easily have been paralyzed by toxic shame as he preached to and encouraged friends and members of those same families he had killed. In his sixties and under house arrest for his faith, Paul wrote, "...one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and

straining toward what is ahead, I press on...”<sup>14</sup>

Toxic shame can be a choice. The past cannot change; why waste time on it? Today and tomorrow, with the Difference-maker in the lead, we have the opportunity to follow his plan of escape from self-defeating thoughts and live a different kind of life.

God’s promise is that no shadow of shame will darken our faces if we look to him.<sup>15</sup> Read the book of **John** as you begin or strengthen your walk with God.

Note: We all need assistance sometimes. When toxic shame is connected to unaddressed memories and trauma, emotional disturbances and the inability to function normally, we may benefit most from professional help.

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you.<sup>16</sup>



## **Prayer to the Difference-maker**

*“... many are saying of my soul,  
‘There is no salvation for him in God.’*

*But you, O LORD,  
are a shield about me, my glory,  
and the lifter of my head.”*

**Psalm 3:2-4 (ESV)**

## Practical Exercise 3: Examine the Evidence



If you answer yes to one of the questions on the left, you have a new day in the court of your mind. Check out the corresponding links on the right.

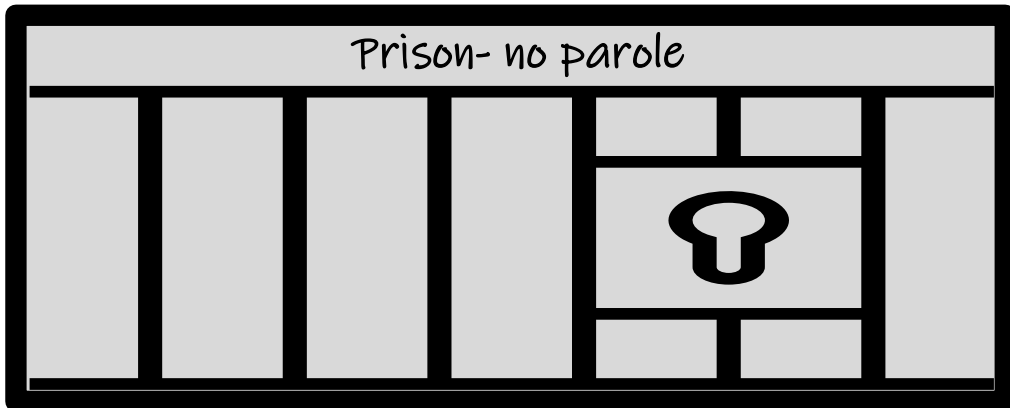
### COLUMN 1 ABOUT YOUR SHAME

1. Were you a child?
2. Were you manipulated?
3. Were you unable physically, psychologically, or otherwise to act differently?
4. Are you still carrying the secret?
5. Was it an honest mistake or an accident?
6. Is it possible you are believing someone else's version of events?
7. Was your behavior intentional?
8. Was it malicious?
9. Was it evil?
10. Would you repeat the same behavior now?
11. If your child or friend did the same thing, would you forgive them?
12. Do you believe God can forgive you if he wants to?

### COLUMN 2 HOW GOD RESPONDS

1. [Mark 10:13-16;](#)  
[Luke 17:1-2](#)
2. [Proverbs 28:10;](#)  
[Psalms 17:2](#)
3. [2 Samuel 22:17-19;](#)  
[Psalms 10: 14](#)
4. [1 John 1:9;](#)  
[Psalms 44:21](#)
5. [Psalms 33:13-15;](#)  
[1 John 3: 20](#)
6. [Psalms 40: 15-16;](#)  
[Psalms 25:4-5](#)
7. [Romans 5:6-10;](#)  
[Romans 3:22-25](#)
8. [Ezekiel 33:14-16;](#)  
[Colossians 3:1-17](#)
9. [Titus 3:3-7;](#)  
[Luke 23:33-34](#)
10. [Colossians 1:9-14;](#)  
[1 Corinthians 13:11](#)
11. [Matthew 5:7-8;](#)  
[Ephesians 4:31-32](#)
12. [Luke 15:4-7;](#)  
[John 3:16-17](#)

## Next, secure your release



Draw prison bars on the outside of a box. Cut a slit in the top large enough to put sheets or slips of paper inside. Place this wherever it will help you most. Keep a notebook and pen nearby.

Toxic shame dumps barrels of past problems on us each day. These issues and memories are impossible to change, so we remain ashamed.

*If you are therapeutically ready to leave the past behind (that is, you are not stuffing anything away that you need to talk about), let go and allow God to pour his grace over history. Whenever shame for something you no longer do begins to stress you, write it out, place it in the prison box, and leave it there forever.*

Secure your release by throwing away the key.

# 4

## *Self-loathing*

*Some thoughts: I'm not good enough. No one can love me. I'm too old or young, too fat or thin, too uneducated or inexperienced, too introverted or boisterous. I'm always too much and too little. Ugly! Idiot! Trouble! That's me; I am a mistake.*

**M**r. Self-loathing is in the "I" business. He sells *I-should-not be me* and *I-should-have-done-better*. His top sales manager, Ms. Sense of Worthlessness, invented *I'm not-as-good-as-so-n-so*, and *I'm-sorry-for-everything*. Their chief of business communications, ol' Negative Self-talk, specializes in *I am a loser of every type imaginable*.

Mr. Self-loathing blinds us to the wonderful mysteries of other people by laser-beam focusing inward. In public we worry if we are coming across okay. In private we wonder what others think about us.

When we do not believe in our aptitude, personality, or lovability we miss out on the love others try to extend. Compliments upset us

***Mr. Negative self-talk destroys identities and paralyzes dreams. Period. That is all he does.***





because in our minds, they cannot possibly be true. We believe people are only placating us for what purpose we do not know. Miniscule mistakes blare, *I can't get anything right!*

Loathing is a strong term and appropriate for this self-debasing thinking. As a thought habit, it responds well to Practical Exercise #1.

If we buy the goods Ms. Sense of Worthlessness sells, self-loathing goes public. She excels at over-apologizing. One of her favorites is, “Oh, excuse me” (even though you nearly knocked me onto my keester, and two bags of popcorn ripped open in front of my three very young children who now look like foraging raccoons. But hey, I’m sorry- to you- who is long gone.)

Another favorite is, “I’m sorry to bother you” (though you said I am not bothering you a minute ago, and each time I have walked into your office since you hired me you have said the same).

She also encourages her customers to say, *I am sorry* with body language, when nothing out of the ordinary has occurred.

Maybe we rationalize apologies as nice, polite, or sympathetic. Unfortunately, unnecessary and excessive apologizing generally frames us as untrustworthy and weak, even if we are not those things. The practice works against us.

Mr. Negative Self-talk destroys identities and paralyzes dreams. Period. That is all he does. His attacks against our wellbeing are old voices, thoughts, and beliefs playing on a loop, each geared toward the abuse and vandalization of our minds, bodies, and spirits.

One meme says, “If a friend speaks to you the way you speak to yourself, how long will you be friends?” Well, what if a friend talks about herself, using thoughts you hold against yourself, how long before you try to reassure her?

## **Baggage and Beliefs**

Some of our baggage is based on negative, false core beliefs, usually adopted in childhood. Three steps form a belief.

- A significant person to us, one in authority or someone we trust or admire, sends or affirms a message, positive or negative, through speech or actions.
- Our experience must support that message whether by perception or reality.
- Then we must repeat the message to ourselves.

For instance, a teacher says, “You are weak at math.” On the next exam, you miss some equations. This experience might become your “evidence” of weakness in math. By repeating to yourself, *I’m terrible at math*, you affix the belief.

Negative false core beliefs, often buried deep inside and out of sight, strongly affect our decisions even when we are unaware.

Jeff is not introspective and tends to go about his business with an air of certainty. However, he turns down promotions, and lately,

anger rises when the manager asks him to take on more leadership responsibility.

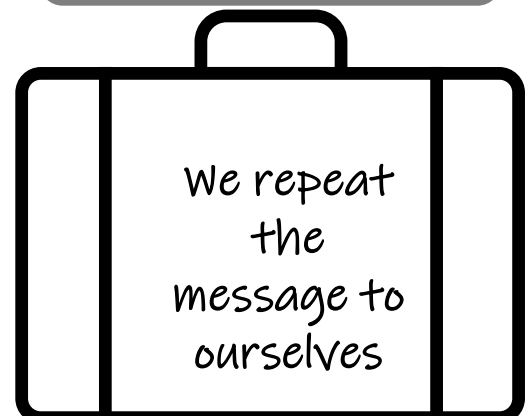
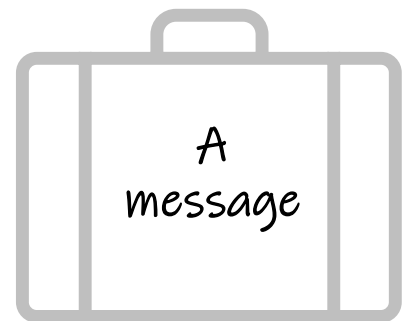
Jeff's wife suggests he begin to question for the first time if there is more behind these decisions. Starting with the Difference-maker, he asks for help.

His dad had been promoted several times within the company for which he worked most of his life. At an older age he was fired and replaced by a younger man who earned less. This happened when Jeff was a teenager, and he heard an earful as his dad blamed the bosses, the "system", and bad luck.

Jeff picked up on the message that no matter how hard one tries, getting ahead will result in financial disaster anyway. Throughout his life he gathered evidence of injustice supporting this message. He mumbled, "That's the way it is," until he no longer had to be aware of it to base his life around it.

Uncovering this core belief changed his attitude. He took time to challenge the old fear with evidence to the contrary.

## Beliefs Baggage



Whether he accepts a promotion is not the point. He is his own man, free to make decisions about his future without an underlying fear of loss undermining his goals.

Any one of us may have our sense of identity buried under mounds of such beliefs. *I am stupid. I am annoying. No one can truly love me. I do not belong here...* and on and on it goes. We watch our dreams float past like clouds and mutter, “I can’t, I am not enough.”

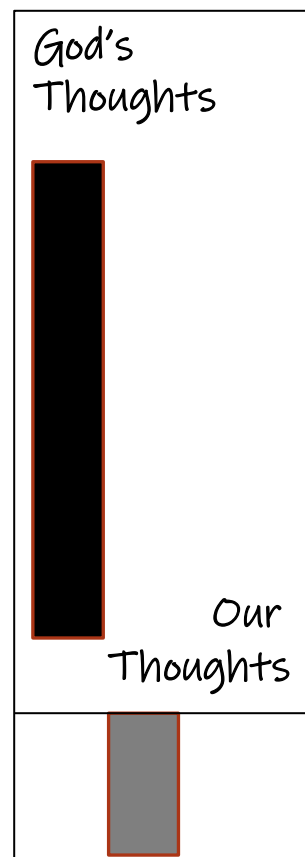
### **Another point of view**

Self-loathing, a sense of worthlessness, and negative self-talk may be familiar and oddly comforting. Perhaps this is how someone significant to us treats us. Maybe it is all we have known. No matter how the put-downs started God wants to change our thinking.

He highly values us. He created people in his image.<sup>1</sup> He made humans but a little lower than himself.<sup>2</sup>

These facts do not make us little gods; he alone is God. He said, “My thoughts are nothing like your thoughts, and my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine.”<sup>3</sup>

By questioning our worth, are we not assuming his thoughts are the lower ones? We curse one human being who is made in God’s likeness and often harshly judge others who remind us of ourselves!<sup>4</sup>



Taking God's point of view to heart is to embrace grace, that mysterious and priceless gift of God's favor and blessing that no one can earn.

God does not make mistakes; therefore, I matter.  
God loves me with an unending love; therefore, I am lovable.  
I am human with strengths and weaknesses like everyone;  
therefore, I am as valuable.  
There is purpose for my life; therefore, I will make a difference.  
I am who God says I am; therefore, I have a unique identity.



### **Take in the Difference-maker's messages**

#### **I am whole as God's art.**

For I am God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which he prepared in advance for me to do. <sup>5</sup>

He created my inmost being; he knit me together in my mother's womb. <sup>6</sup>

#### **I am whole because I am new.**

This means that I, who belong to Christ, have become a new person. My old life is gone; a new life has begun! <sup>7</sup>

Because of the LORD's great love, I am not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning. Great is God's faithfulness! <sup>8</sup>

### **I belong because I am God's child.**

See what great love the Father has lavished on me, that I should be called a child of God! And that is what I am! <sup>9</sup>

### **I belong and am a friend of Jesus.**

I am friends with the Lord and Savior? Yes! Abraham believed God... and he was called a friend of God.<sup>10</sup>

He calls me friend, for everything that he has learned from the Father he has made known to me.<sup>11</sup>

### **I am secure.**

Though my father and mother forsake me, the LORD will receive me.<sup>12</sup>

I am one of Good Shepherd's sheep and I listen to his voice. He knows me, and I follow him. He gives me eternal life, and I will never perish. No one can snatch me away for the Father is more powerful than anyone else. No one can snatch me from the Father's hand.<sup>13</sup>

### **I am strong when I am weak.**

Christ's grace is all I need. His power works best in my weakness. So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me.<sup>14</sup>



## **Prayer to the Difference-maker**

*Thank you for making me so  
wonderfully complex! Your  
workmanship is marvelous -  
how well I know it.*

**Psalm 139:14**

## Practical Exercise 4: Word-Swap

Reassure yourself as you might a friend. I needed a game, something with a little challenge in it, to help make a thought exchange. So, I made one up.

It is amazing how fast it worked. From decades of self-abusive language in my head to *automatically* (without effort) challenging those thoughts took only a few weeks.



**Challenge 1:** Awareness. Begin noticing how you automatically speak (audibly or not) to yourself.

**Challenge 2:** Stop when you are about to insult or call yourself names. Take the first letter of your negative word(s) and think of positive replacements that start with the same letter. Examples:

Exchange stupid for *strong, smart, successfully washed my truck...*

Exchange loser for *loving, learning, Lisa's best friend...*

**Challenge 3:** Choose positive words that speak well of you ***even if you do not believe them yet.*** It is tricky, and just might make you cringe or laugh aloud at first.

**Challenge 4:** Keep it up!



## Next, test messages and messengers



**1. Question the messages** that helped produce or support your negative core beliefs. Are the messages true?

Example: If you believe you never do anything right, look about you and write down all you have accomplished in the last 24 hours. (You read this page, right? That is one.) No matter how small you think the accomplishment, it is evidence to the contrary of "never do anything right."

Ask the Holy spirit to show you what your core beliefs are.

**2. Question the messengers.** From well-intended loved ones to marketers to abusers, messages given us as children and older can come from unreliable sources. Ask these potentially revealing questions about the sources of those messages:

Do you know who they are? Are they mature and responsible? Are they liars? Narcissistic? Are they emotionally incapable of realistic insight? Maybe they are repeating unchallenged false, negative core beliefs of their own. Are they suggestible and reactionary with their emotions? Are they knowledgeable and wise?

**What if they were wrong?  
That changes everything, does it not?**

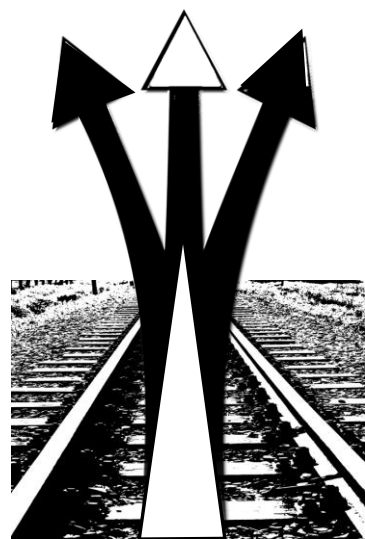
# 5

## *Extreme Conclusions*

*How I feel in this moment is how I will always feel. No one is trustworthy. If the result will be perfect, I'll do it; if not, I won't try. God only helps those who help themselves. I'll make sure you are happy. I'll sleep when I'm dead. I always do what is right and you never do. If I do not get this new job, I'll have to go back to the old one.*

**E**xtrême conclusions are mental destinations. We travel there via trains of thought. Four main engines pull separate lines of cargo cars, loaded with random thoughts and assumptions. These engines are called: Black-and-white; All-or-nothing; Either-or; and Pass-fail.

Extreme conclusions are depressive when expectations are not met. For example, in the sports world winning is everything. If an athlete with a pass-fail mindset loses, the athlete's sense of personal value may hang on the scoreboard.



Disclaimer: Absolute truths exist as expressed throughout this book; that is not the topic here.

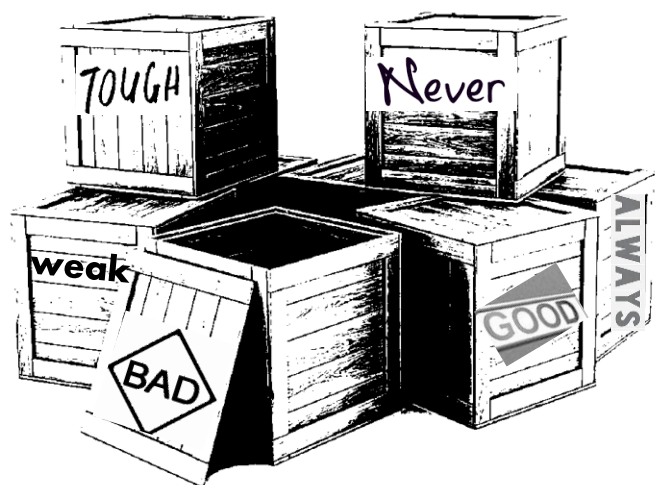
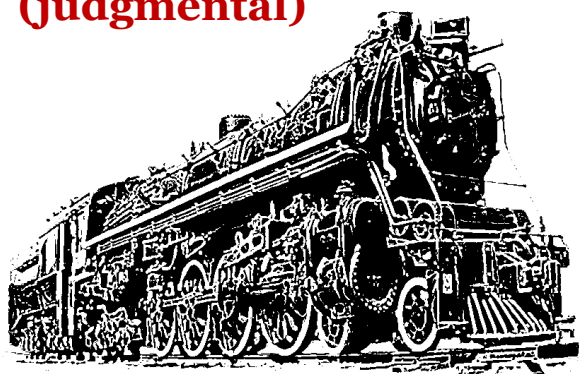
Throughout a lifetime, gray areas, or for the sake of this chapter, the middle track, is where most decisions are made. We want to land at reasonable conclusions. Listening, learning, compromising, making fair judgments, and extending mercy swiftly carry us to that more satisfying place.

Once there, we find closer relationships, higher self-esteem, forgiveness, and honesty.

It is imperative our thoughts ride the middle rails. Outside of that, we lose sight of options. We wind up lost in Extreme Conclusions, our minds closed.

### **Black-and-white (judgmental)**

Black-and-white thinking is the monster truck of thought engines, the gold medalist in conveying undecipherable messages to our brain at speeds so fast that we are at Extreme Conclusions well before we have had a chance to reconsider.



Primarily, this mindset judges. By dissecting life and boxing it in with manmade rules, it labels situations, people, ideas, emotions, and even God as all good or all bad.

Unwanted or disagreeable

ideas and emotions are stored out of reach and dismissed.

Jesus lived in the gray. Violently against hypocrisy and manmade religious laws, and passionate about his Father, he taught a transformative love.

Do not judge,<sup>1</sup> open your eyes and arms to the stranger,<sup>2</sup> and share with those in need,<sup>3</sup> he preached. Greet people who are not your people,<sup>4</sup> pray for your enemies,<sup>5</sup> and do to others as you would want them to do to you.<sup>6</sup>

He was radical then and still is. It was against religious rules to do any work on the Sabbath, yet Jesus healed people and allowed his hungry disciples to pick grain on holy days. He lifted women to a higher plane, speaking to them directly and treating them with the same respect he offered men. He welcomed women to choose discipleship. Love and decency shown to the poor and socially despised became a hallmark of his ministry.

He was not so patient with religious hypocrites.

Jesus told a now-famous parable<sup>7</sup> about extreme conclusions of the self-righteous black-and-white variety, and their opposite.

A man of a certain race and creed was beaten by robbers and left to die. Two people of the same race and creed saw him lying there and ignored him.

Why? He was inconvenient. They had work to finish and religious rules to follow. Touching a dead man back then would make them ceremonially unclean for seven days<sup>8</sup>. They would not take the chance.

A third man came along, this time of a race and creed that shared a long-standing animosity toward the people of the robbed man. Normally, these two populations did not interact or even touch some of the same items.

Social norms did not cause this third passer-by to hesitate. He saw only human need and rushed to the aid of a person dying by the side of the road. Instead of us versus them, he chose middle ground.



He cleaned the man's wounds with oil and wine, bandaged his lacerations, and took him to an inn where the owner agreed to watch over his recovery. The kind stranger paid for room and board, promised to check back, and left to go about his business.



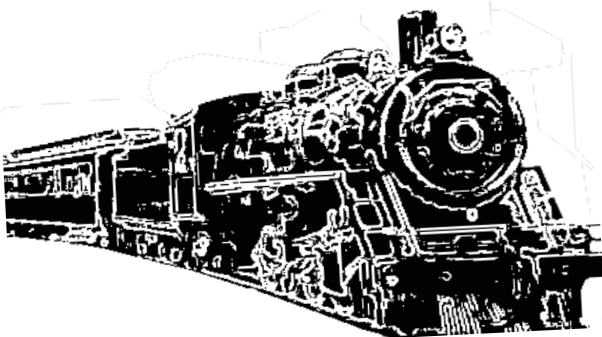
Black and white judgments often have nothing to do with love. The Difference-maker reminds us that he holds all knowledge, and we know but part.<sup>9</sup> Blinded to a log in our eyes, we will hurt people by attempting speck-removal surgery on theirs.<sup>10</sup>

*He saw  
only  
human  
need and  
rushed to  
the aid of  
a person  
dying by  
the side of  
the road.  
Instead of  
us versus  
them, he  
chose  
middle  
ground.*

“Make sure that the light you think you have is not actually darkness. If you are filled with light, with no dark corners, then your whole life will be radiant, as though a floodlight were filling you with light.”<sup>10.5</sup>

## **All-or-nothing (misdirected drive)**

All-or-nothing is 101% investment in a single area of life to the exclusion of all else. It is a one-track train of thought.



Be it work, education, legacy, fame, power, pursuit of money, or anything else, an all-or-nothing mindset mimics tyranny, threatening to stop us altogether unless we remain in a deplorable state of constant motion, stress, and guilt.

Whatever consumes our priorities and imagination, vital moments and relationships that make life worthwhile wilt in the caboose. Depression is an unsurprising pay-off, as are heart attacks. Balance is in the middle.

Common modern misdirected drives such as the love of money and control over one's destiny, are also ancient.

A rich young man,<sup>11</sup> clearly spiritually sensitive, approached Jesus. “I have carefully followed all the ten commandments,” he said. “What else must I do to earn eternal life?”

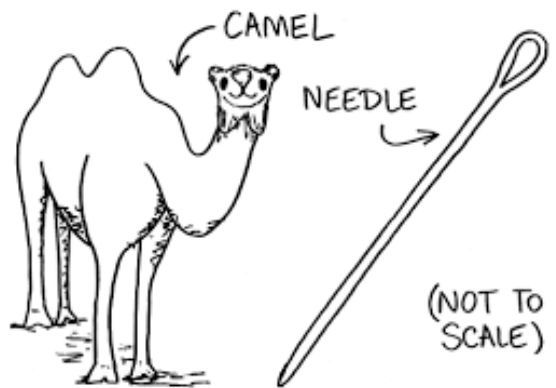
With love, Jesus offered a shocking plan. He suggested the man sell his possessions and give the money to the poor. This ran far deeper

than asking for a donation. Jesus' intentions appear less about sacrificial giving than faith.

One sect of religious teachers at the time commonly taught that wealth proved God's approval and was a likely ticket to heaven if heaven existed. The young man went away sad, and this false teaching may be part of the reason. His question had been about obeying rules. Jesus' answer challenged him to 'break' one of the so-called rules that provided comfort.

Driven to earn more, collect more, and reassure himself, he missed everything he had been looking for. He was afraid of losing status, his hope of salvation by a means other than Jesus.

To his disciples who witnessed this exchange, Jesus said, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God."



They were naturally astounded at this unfamiliar teaching. If it were impossible for the rich to enter

heaven, what hope was there for the poor? For them? They asked, "Who then can be saved?"

Jesus said, "With man this is impossible, *but with God* all things are possible." In one sentence, he negated the notion that anything, but God's grace, can usher people into eternal life.

All-or-nothing thinking potentially affects us in any area. Jesus said, "No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other; you will be devoted to one and despise the other."<sup>12</sup>

*Detour warning!*

A popular heresy is the “prosperity gospel,” promising gullible people that God wants them rich. Lest there be any doubt, Paul explains this topic in a letter to the young pastor, Timothy.

“These are the things you are to teach and insist on. If anyone teaches otherwise and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, they are conceited and understand nothing. They have an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions and constant friction between people of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain.

“But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs...

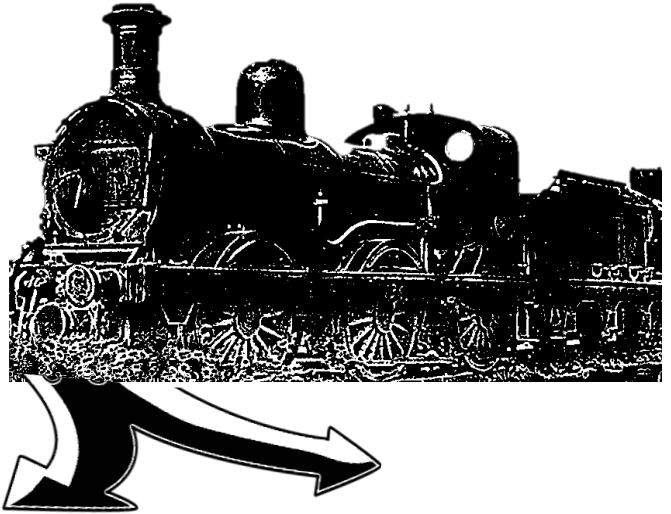
“Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.”

1 Timothy 6:3-19niv



## Either-or (limited vision)

Either-or narrows our vision to only two possible choices. It leaves no space for fresh solutions. Living in this mindset is depressive because whatever we want outside of these limited options is locked out of consideration.



William was turned down when he applied for work on the railroad in 1944. He was too young. Extreme conclusions told him it was useless to try again although the original dream never died.

It is easy to look at William and think he could have tried harder, nonetheless, what about us? Have we given up dreaming? Are we staying in abusive relationships because we cannot see a way out? Have we denied ourselves recovery because it seems impossible? Do we accept mental health struggles with an “oh well” shrug and balk at seeking help?

Do we worship the all-powerful, all-knowing, always-loving “God with us”,<sup>13</sup> or keep our distance for fear he will ruin our lives?

Maybe we hide behind either-or, too.

Train tracks mechanically move at what are aptly called switches. Railyards have complex systems allowing engines with or without cars to completely reverse and travel the opposite direction!



Switches are a massive undertaking and an engineering marvel.

In what we may appropriately call another marvel, the Difference-maker willingly switches at any time our one-track thoughts. If we allow God's possibilities to override our either-or, faith asks a positive, "what if?"

What if God plans to conduct me through the impossible?

What if his strength is enough for me to try something new?

What if his wisdom will guide me safely away from repeated efforts that have never worked, and into freedom?

What if I survive? What if I can start over? What if?

Mary's and Martha's brother Lazarus was severely ill.<sup>14</sup> Worried, the sisters sent an urgent message to Jesus, *Please come!*

His reaction is still jolting:

*"Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So, when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days..."* (italics mine)

Lazarus died. To many, Jesus' slowness did not look like concern enough.

Martha ran to meet him as he arrived at town. She said, "If you had only been here, my brother would not have died!"

Mary slumped at his feet, tortured by the same thought. “Lord, if you had been here...” Visitors who had come to grieve with Martha and Mary, mumbled, “He could have saved Lazarus’ life...”

Deeply impassioned by the lack of faith around him,<sup>15</sup> Jesus walked to a small cave covered by a stone. It was Lazarus’ grave. “Move the stone,” he said.

“But Lord!” said Martha. “By this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days.”

Lazarus’ sisters were stuck in either-or thinking partially due to the society in which they grew up. Among the many false religious teachings of their day, it was believed that the soul left the body permanently after three days.

*No one had  
expected  
this.*

Four days after death meant no more hope for miracles. Either Jesus had come quickly, or it was too late. Either Jesus had raised Lazarus a day earlier, or it was impossible even for him.

The stone out of the way, Jesus called in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!”

Lazarus emerged from the dark cave into daylight. Jesus said, “Take off his grave clothes and let him go.”

No one had expected this. No one dreamed that Jesus’ love included the inexplicable.



The disciples had heard him say earlier that Lazarus would live. He had informed Martha also that Lazarus would be raised. Yet that was not enough for them to understand and believe.<sup>16</sup>

Jesus wept with Mary and Martha, yearning to increase their faith. He was glad to see many of the witnesses finally set aside their doubts.

The resurrection of Lazarus was significant for another reason. When powerful religious leaders heard about this miracle, their somewhat paranoid ideas about Jesus and how many people were turning to him, increased. They convened as a unit to plot Jesus' murder, not admitting they had no power to kill him outside of God's timing.

Ultimately, by waiting to answer the sisters' desperate plea, the completion of Christ Jesus' great mission took place, voluntarily paying the bloody price for our sins, and coming back from death. Through the experience of Lazarus, he had left his followers with proof of his power to restore life no matter the odds.

The death Lazarus endured was never in vain. God, who exists in timelessness, knew precisely what everyone needed most. They saw suffering; he saw the unfolding of his perfect plan. They grieved the end of a life; he rejoiced at the beginning of eternal life for all who would trust in him completely.



The Difference-maker works miracles far beyond either-or.

## Pass-or-fail (merciless)



Is anything more emotionally self-punishing than to measure ourselves against an impossible standard? The psalmist wrote, “Even perfection has its limits...”<sup>17</sup>

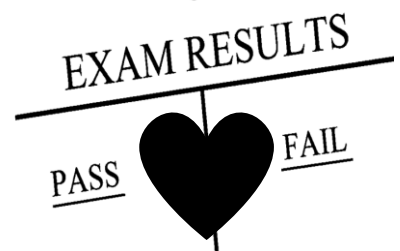
A pass-or-fail train of thought is brutal. Without mercy, it demands an accounting for every mistake. Do not think it rewards wise choices! No, this train is on to the next opportunity to run over its victim. Most often, that is you.

Olivet’s goal is to find a job in a new career. Measuring her success by using a scale of 1-100, she gives herself a 30 for returning to school as an older adult. Finishing with an Associate’s degree, she adds another 30. She finds it difficult to land a job. Does this drop her back to zero?

Pass-or-fail thinking takes such a punch and does not rise. *All this effort has been a waste of time.*

Mercy accepts reality’s middles. Is stamina in Olivet’s job search worth 20? She counts her successful steps. Already she is at 80, and not yet hired!

Unemployed Olivet might look like a loser to some. Not to God! “People judge by the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”<sup>18</sup>



One of Jesus' closest friends, Peter was an emotional man with good intentions and quick impulses. Words tended to leap from his mouth before careful thought.

He opened his mouth one time too many. Only hours before Jesus was arrested on trumped-up charges, Peter vowed his allegiance saying, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never deny you!"<sup>19</sup>

Jesus said, "Peter, before morning, by the time a rooster crows twice, you will have already denied me three times."

A crowd of men armed with swords and clubs took Jesus into custody in the middle of the night. His disciples scattered in fear. Peter had enough courage to follow Jesus to the trial, albeit from far behind. He found himself hiding near a campfire with guards and others who had been at the arrest.<sup>20</sup>

A servant girl recognized him. "You were one of those with Jesus."

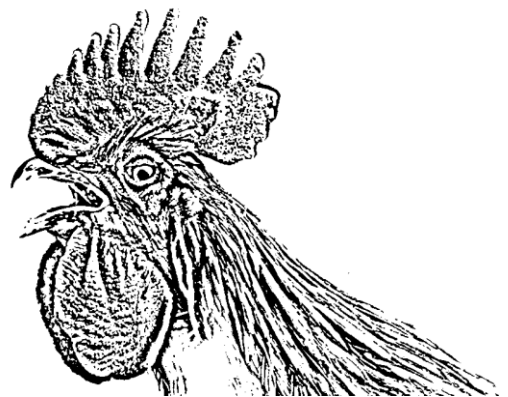
Peter answered for all those around the fire to hear. "I don't know what you're talking about!"

A rooster crowed in the background.

As the rumor traveled, people stared. A voice spoke from the shadows. "He is one of them!"

Panicking, Peter said, "I swear I don't know the man!"

Other bystanders confronted him.



“You must be one of his followers. Your accent gives you away.”

“A curse on me if I’m lying. I don’t know the man!”

Immediately, the rooster crowed again.

*Before the rooster crows. Before the rooster crows.* Agonizing shame stabbed at his heart and beleaguered his mind. *You will deny me three times before the rooster crows twice.* Bolting from that place, Peter wept bitterly.

If life is a pass-fail test with God, Peter failed. At the most important moment in history, he crumbled. That is not the end of Peter’s story.

Jesus was crucified. Three days later, after Jesus rose to life, Peter raced with all his might to the grave to see if this report were true.<sup>21</sup> I imagine he had never dreamed of a second chance.

Jesus showed himself to the disciples several times over the next forty days. One morning, as he sat with seven of them, Jesus said to Peter, “Do you love me more than these?”<sup>22</sup>

American English is limited in that we use one word for love, relying on inflection and context to fill-in-the-blanks. The ancient languages of the Bible were more specific. Jesus was asking, “Do you love me dearly, more than these other disciples do? Do you love me now with total commitment and devotion?”

*If life is a pass-fail test with God, Peter failed.*

Having once said he would not deny Jesus even if everyone else did, Peter's pride was tested. Understanding clearly that the Lord knew him better than he knew himself, he may have been afraid to answer. Perhaps he doubted his capability to love like he had been certain he could.

He said, "You know that I love You with a deep, personal affection, as for a close friend."

"Then feed my lambs," Jesus told him, restoring Peter to his preaching and teaching ministry.

Jesus repeated the question. "Simon, son of John, (as Peter was also known) do you love me dearly, more than these others do, with total commitment and devotion?"

Peter stood by his original, friend-type answer.

"Then take care of my sheep."

Suddenly, Jesus changed his question. "Peter, do you love me with a deep, personal affection, as for a close friend?"

It is almost as if Jesus were questioning Peter's truth-telling; *but do you really?* Perhaps this is how Peter heard it. Still torn up by shame and self-doubt, his reply was emphatic. "You know everything!"

Jesus assured him in a perplexing way. "When you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and arms, and someone else will dress you, and carry you where you do not wish to go."



To Peter, this dire news meant that he would, one day, be the man he wanted to become. Unafraid to love Jesus with his whole heart, he would stare martyrdom in the eye and courageously accept the ultimate cost of following the Messiah.

One can almost feel the relief that swept over Peter's body, making his arms limp and body sag. Although scripture does not tell us, I imagine Peter weeping again, this time in gratitude and relief.

Jesus said, "Follow me."

Three years earlier, Jesus had called to Peter to *follow* him, the original language meaning, "Come here." Peter had enthusiastically become a believer and devotee. Why say it again?

This time, the word follow was an invitation to walk the same path Jesus had walked. Peter had a quality decision to make. He was forgiven and grace welcomed him back. Would he accept?

Later, Peter faced the council that had condemned Jesus to die. This was said of him: "The members of the council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter..."<sup>23</sup> Yes, Peter accepted and so can we. Our failures or missteps do not determine our value.

Paul reflected on why God houses his great power in human believers, calling us "fragile clay jars."<sup>24</sup>

Fragility, with clay feet like Peter's, helps to keep us from the extreme conclusion that we are wiser than God, becoming big-shots, forgetting that all good and perfect gifts are from the Difference-maker<sup>25</sup> who loves us with an everlasting love.

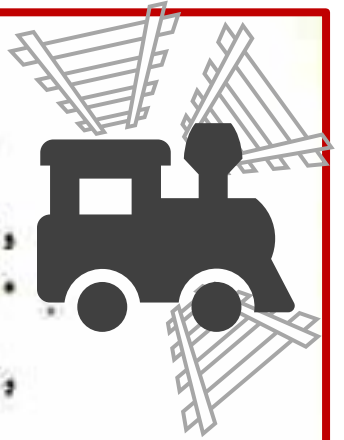
## **Prayer to the Difference-maker**

*Lord, I'm standing at the crossroads  
and looking; asking for the ancient  
paths, asking where the good way is,  
so I can walk in it. You promise it is  
there that I will find rest for my soul.  
Guide me Lord, Amen.*

**Based on Jeremiah 6:16**

Just for laughs

Run her fifty miles an hour  
Jerk them off their pegs,  
If you switch a lot of cars,  
I'll bring you a dozen eggs.



Those brakemen up in Newark,  
They just aren't in it.  
Bowles got off Thirty Six,  
Going fifty miles a minute.



He tore the shoes right off his feet  
So the story goes,  
That's the reason all the cinders  
are embedded in his nose.

Nip off a couple Tippy  
Cut off a couple more.  
They are going at Dick in one and two  
And they're running back in four.

You switch 'em on the Licking track,  
And you switch them on the main,  
You take them to the scale track,  
And switch them out again.



Switching down in Ham town  
Is sure hard on the dogs,  
I think I'll take a leave of absence,  
And go to calling hogs.

Written by Herbert R. Tipton

# Practical Exercise 5: Train of Thought

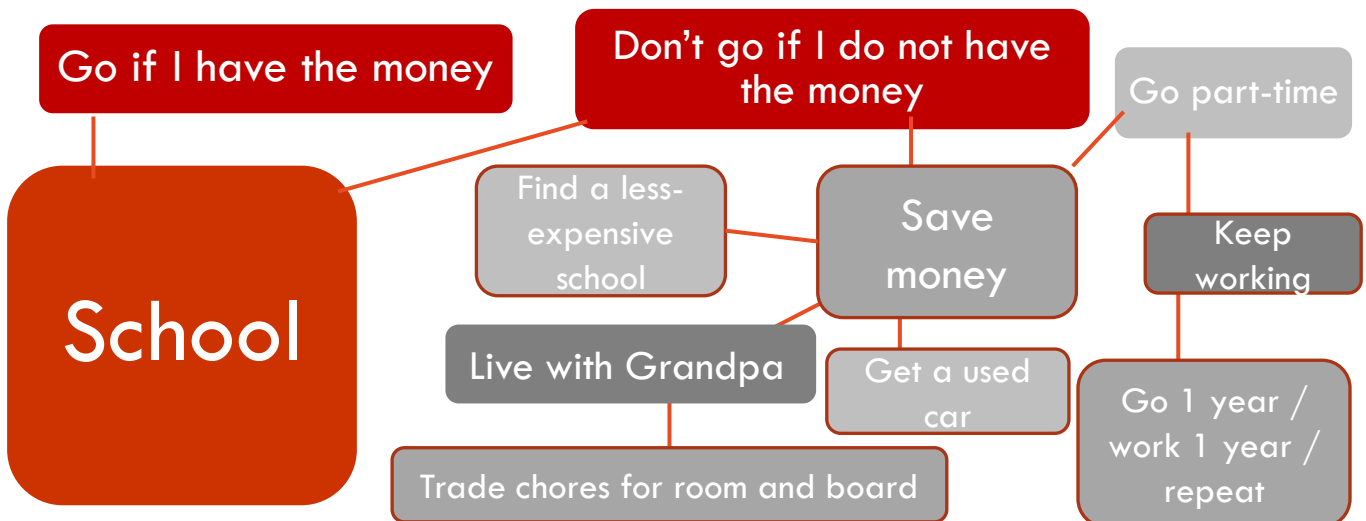
Switching our train of thought away from judgmentalism and mercilessness supports self- confidence, patience, and relief. The following word trade-offs land us in the middles.

## Exchange:

- Should for Could
- Hopeless for Challenging
- But for And
- Must/ought for It is an option
- I am tough for I'll find support
- I am useless for I am fragile right now
- Always for Often or sometimes
- Can't for It will be difficult
- Never for Unlikely or rarely
- I can't take it for I'll figure out something positive I can do



## Brainstorm More Options



## Next, know when to say yes for a most-fulfilling life

Knowing what is of utmost importance to you will help prevent misdirected drive.

1. Take time to list all your current obligations. This will include family, friends, job, financial expenditures, physical health, mental health, spiritual goals, what God has asked of you, and anything that you must finish.

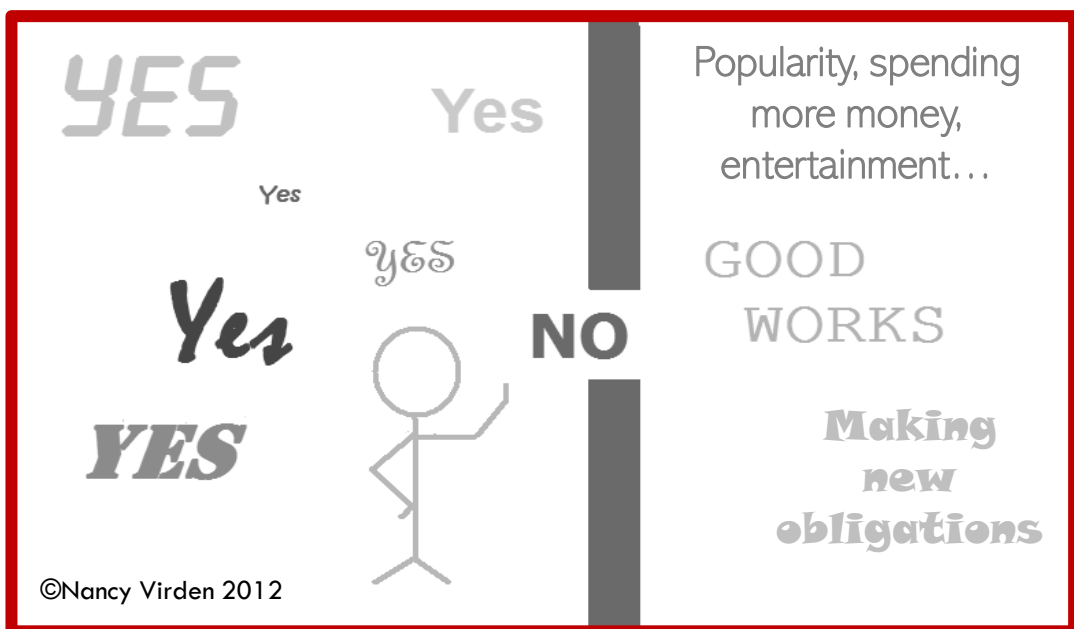
2. Look realistically at the above. Is there anything that does not fit within your daily

availability, finances, emotional energy or physical capabilities?

3. Is there anything you can remove from this list? Ask for God's wisdom.

What remains are yesses.


With rare exceptions, everything else is a no. Each time you agree to secondary activities, expenses or obligations, you are trading-in and saying no to something (or someone) you more highly value.



# 6

## *Hopelessness*

*Some thoughts: No win is possible. Nothing can improve. These losses are too heavy with only more to come. God cannot stand me anymore. My family is better off without me. I am a burden. Everyone else is happier. I cannot fight the pain anymore. I'm done.*



**T** rue hopelessness has no sense of humor. It is scary and overbearing on each minute of the day. It is not somewhat hopeful like when a possibility is unlikely; it is devoid of any expectations for good now or in the future. Abject hopelessness can be fatal.

This fact drives the passion behind me and many ministries and services trying to spread another message: what seems like an end is a façade, fakery; options are only hidden in the darkness; hope is always present even when we temporarily cannot see it.

If you are feeling suicidal, or concerned about someone who is, call:  
**U.S. National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 1-800-273-TALK (8255)**  
**Crisis text line- Text "HELLO" to 741-741**

**If you are suicidal with a plan, *immediately* call 911 in the U.S. (112 in the EU) or go to your nearest emergency room.**

**For other international hotlines, go [here](#)**

Nothing in this book is to substitute for professional mental or behavioral health care.

## The Real

I am a suicide attempt survivor. One cannot climb out of that airless pit without having learned new ways to breathe.

Only a few days after leaving the hospital, I attended the Partial Hospitalization Program (PHP) suggested by my doctors. There, a potent weapon to use against suicidal thoughts came from an unlikely source.

The scene was a small room intended for about fifteen people, crowded instead with twenty-five or more who were scrambling for chairs. A few chatting voices exposed the general climate. "I'm headed for rehab." "I just got back." "I'm going to lose my job if I miss any more work."

Most of us stared silently. A single therapist managed to find space and called everyone to quiet.

At his leading, one by one, people offered a number between 1-5, rating the power of their suicidal thoughts. Most chose 2 or 3. A few of us with higher numbers were challenged to offer specific plans for staying safe until the next day. One man was sent back to the hospital.

Then a woman spoke quietly, "A thought is just a thought. I guess we do not have to act on it."

I was stunned. Her simple logic sounded profound to a brain tangled in disorder and raging mood swings. *A thought is... only a thought?* I tried to sort it out. *But how I feel now is how I will always feel...*

Unless you have been there, it will be difficult to comprehend the grueling emotions of a suicidal mindset. Each person experiences



it differently, but I will try to offer a glimpse into that dark space.

Alone in a pitch-black alley, you collapse to the ground, soundless

groans wrenching from deep within your torso.

Thick briars and vipers pervade the trail that led you here. For years, you have navigated treacherous mountains of jagged rocks and falling boulders. Your body is broken and bloodied.

If you could or wanted to move, the only way to continue your journey would be to grasp with ripped open hands the barbed wire fence by which you entered the alley, place your torn feet on its spikes, and climb.

Snarls in the blackness feel warm to your face. A feral, angry canine snaps at you, brushing your clothes with bared teeth. Without fear, you sense it is a friend. Its hungry jowls are only waiting for you to decide.

As the only visible option outside of returning to the torture of what cannot change, the canine's guarantee is welcome ...

Imagine then, in that hopeless place, hearing that the snarling promise is only a thought.



## The Difference-maker

It is the strangest thing. When therapy started in 2011, I felt vulnerable, like a toddler. I could feel that inner child growing up to 6, 10, then teen over the next months and years. In my actual mid-fifties, I declared my new 20. God gave me a chance to emotionally redo childhood, safely this time, while he re-parented me with truth.

What I had been so certain I could not live without never came to be. Some of the losses I feared have occurred. Joy today comes from having rediscovered who our Creator intended me to become. Peace is from healing on the inside, and finally having my hope where it belongs, in the love of Jesus Christ.

*Pressure made it nearly impossible to breathe the only air - leaking from a cracked sewer pipe.*

Marco was buried alive. A wall of dirt and rock crashed over him, forcing his legs into a backward twist and landing him head downward. Pressure on his chest made it nearly impossible to breathe the only air available leaking from a cracked sewer pipe.

The day passed as frantic rescue efforts continued. Finally, Marco was whisked away to the nearest hospital. He had been buried for eleven hours.

Resulting physical disabilities make daily life challenging. Yet Marco has chosen contentment over bitterness. Calm and compassion have replaced old self-centered and impatient ways.

The foundational extreme conclusion of hopelessness is that nothing can change. It may be true that our circumstances or relationships will not change as we would like. Perhaps it is we who can change. Maybe what we think we need for happiness is worth reconsidering.

“Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past,” God says. “See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.”<sup>1</sup>

My biggest leap toward a return to mental health was making a wary, deliberate decision to learn how to enjoy the life God gave to me. Hope begins to appear when we choose to believe for it.

### **The One who sees you**

God loves you. He cares about you. He is not distant, too busy, or distracted. The LORD is close to the brokenhearted;<sup>2</sup> He who watches over you will not slumber.<sup>3</sup>

Hagar,<sup>4</sup> as an Egyptian slave, pregnant, and in a contentious relationship with the woman she served, had run out of options. She ran away into the desert where the angel of the Lord met her.

He said God was aware of her misery. He promised she was having a son who would be as free as a wild donkey<sup>4.5</sup> and the father of many nations.

No doubt she carried deep longing for any future children to be free from slavery. Reassured of her own future too, she said, “You are the God who sees me.”

In your alley of hopelessness, alone, when fear of staying alive swamps your mind and suicide seems the only way out, there is One who sees you.



Buried alive under mounds of despair and emptiness, lying in the dark corner of a lifeless room, there is One who hears your silent screams and understands what you cannot speak.

As you walk secret trails through unwanted memories of shame and torment, and you believe you are a waste of skin, there is One who knows you completely and loves.

Overwhelmed in a desert of grief and questions, seeing only more loss in your tomorrows, there is One who weeps with you, who stands with you in broken-heartedness.

He loves the child once so battered by other people's sins. He loves the adult in need of rescue from your own sins. He sent his Son for both and offers salvation and healing to each part of you.

So, when you believe there is no hope for change, and everyone will be better off without you, there is One who sees, hears, knows, and loves.

Go ahead, ask him to meet you where you are. He is the only One with the power to guide you through the next minute, hour, day, and year. Reach out to Almighty God, your Difference-maker.

## Dear child of God, you are not failing him

Without a doubt, the most significant loss and cause of grief as I struggled with severe depression was the inability to hear God's voice. I feared he would never speak to me again, that I had gone too far. I felt spiritually dead.



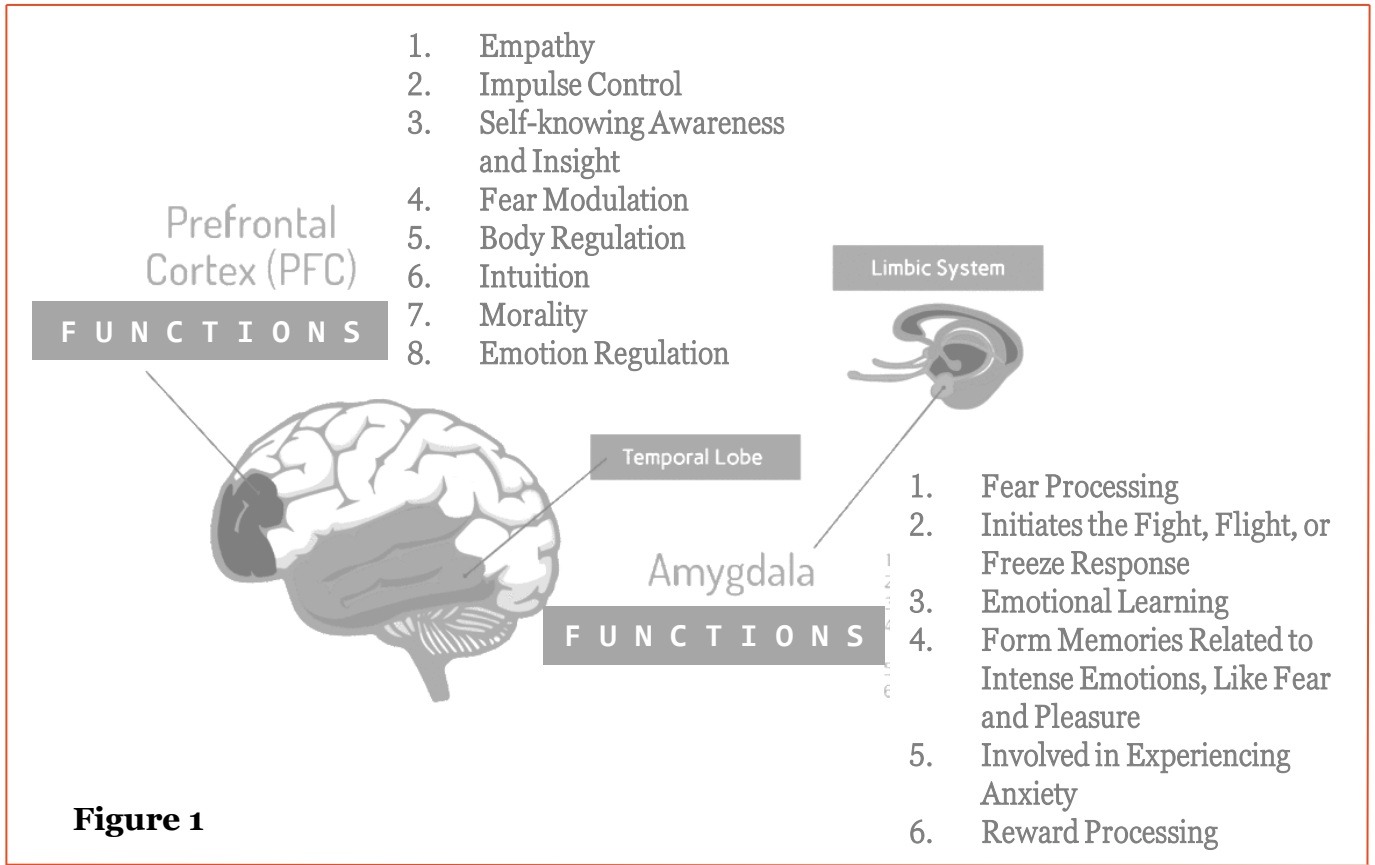
It was not true. How can one be spiritually dead and care about it? Typical experiences accompanying my Christian faith were out of reach due to cognitive and energy issues and anxiety which can come with depression. From fellowship to personal Bible study to a sense of God's love, it was all missing.

Of course, at the time, I had no idea of a physical cause for this spiritual struggle. It seemed my fault. Abject loneliness, hopelessness, a sense of worthlessness, and guilt were what I knew. Pain. Sorrow. Torment. Repeat.

Occasional one-word whispered prayers lifted from my bed. I cried for what seemed like the absence of God.

Then I saw Jesus. There he stood, in a mental picture, a gift from heaven. He did not speak, chase suffering away, or take me to be with him. Unfelt, he was only there with me in the dark. I knew my Savior never left.

Relearning how to think, resolving terrible situations, and physical healing of the brain take a while. God never walks away.<sup>5</sup> His promises keep.<sup>6</sup> His love endures forever.<sup>7</sup>



**Figure 1**

A few scientific facts (simplified so I can understand them!) may help clarify why spiritual vagueness might accompany depression or anxiety.

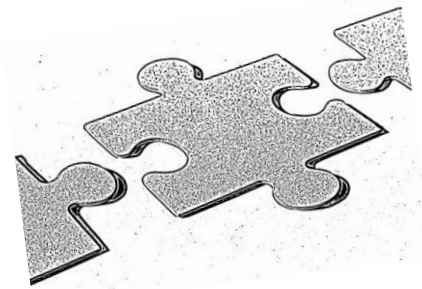
During an episode with depression, the prefrontal cortex of our brain wrestles to varying degrees to function as normal. Scans have shown little activity there in a person with severe depression. Results may include impaired concentration, confusion, increased impulsivity, mood swings, heightened anxiety, and a state of fatigue.

Our amygdala is also on overdrive, so we are thrust into fight, flight, or freeze survival mode. We may lose our ability to feel anything good.

When a package is delivered to a wrong address, everything in it exists in full but is unavailable to the rightful owner. In the same way, while we are dealing with depression, the advice to rest in God's love, know his joy, and fill our minds with his peace lands at the wrong doorstep. We have faith, nevertheless there is little to no *felt* connection to him. We may not experience God or loving God.

With input running through this filter, we may believe we are spiritual failures. *I am not good enough for God; he's tired of me; ministry is over.* These thoughts are untrue, and not how God views his dear children.

Scripture shares testimonies of God meeting people at their points of need without chiding them. Accounts of faith riding out depression,<sup>8</sup> comfort after sorrow,<sup>9</sup> protection during panic,<sup>10</sup> good news calming anxiety,<sup>11</sup> and trust during hopeless situations,<sup>12</sup> are numerous. In Elijah's story alone, we have a beautiful example of God's tenderness toward a deeply depressed prophet who struggled with suicidal thoughts.<sup>13</sup>



By restricting mental health challenges to the realm of the spiritual, or to the moral, we disregard the body and mind aspects of our complete person.

Look at your whole self as God does. He sees you and knows your name. He knows your thoughts, comings and goings, motives and emotions.<sup>14</sup> He knows your *complete* story.

Our Creator understands how the brain works! Is God who notices

every sparrow that falls, unaware of your confusion?<sup>15</sup> His promises to turn all things out for our good and to grow our faith through trials do not imply quick work. Be patient with yourself. One day at a time, as you are ready, God will reveal what he wants you to know.

If you cannot feel him while severely depressed, he has not gone anywhere. You are not failing the Difference-maker by experiencing the painful emotion of hopelessness.

### **God gives us people**

Proverbs 18:14-16 was written by King Solomon, a champion of seeking wise counsel. It reads, “The human spirit can endure in sickness, but a crushed spirit who can bear? The heart of the discerning acquires knowledge for the ears of the wise seek it out.”

Ultimately, it is your and my responsibility to save our lives and escape hopelessness. Like a child trying to lift a rock twice her size, we are not using all our available strength if we do not turn to one who is able to assist.

The Difference-maker can lead us to people he has gifted with knowledge and talent to help us with our specific needs.

### **Family and friends**

Expectations for support from family and friends might be a let-down. Each of us only knows his own despondency and joy.<sup>16</sup>

Just as we cannot fully understand how others feel or experience life, loved ones and friends who genuinely care for our wellbeing do not always know what to say or do when we express hopelessness.

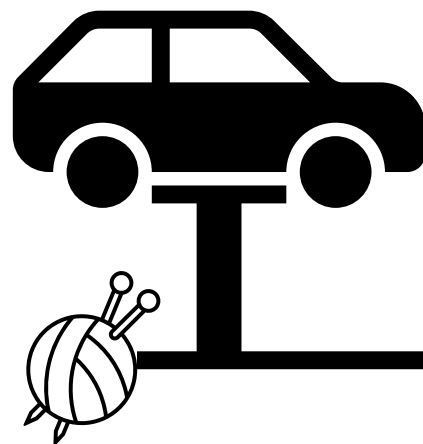
It is vital we understand this. Otherwise, in a fragile state, we might misperceive their unhelpfulness or distance as lack of love.

In their great fear of losing you or missing out on normalcy, or with unsubstantiated guilt for your despair, significant others may react angrily, in a controlling fashion, or defensively. Your calmest friends might resort to platitudes and examples of when they were depressed once and got over it quickly.

Forgive them. Tell them what you need. Ask for what you need. Let them make mistakes. We cannot mindread and presume to know their motives, either.

### **Mental healthcare professionals**

Most of us go to a mechanic to have someone with skill fix our car. We would not stay long if they started knitting new parts! There is nothing helpful to gain from advice without experience or insight to back it up, either.



“Walk with the wise and become wise.”<sup>17</sup> Professional mental health caretakers are available almost everywhere, whether online, over the phone, or in person. Licensing means they have received the necessary training for walking people through unique challenges that present with mental illness, personality and other disorders, trauma, addiction, and negative relationship dynamics.

Two terms frequently confused are *psychiatrist* and *psychologist*. Psychiatrists are medical doctors (M.D. or D.O.). Like all medical specialists, it is their job to assess symptoms and prescribe a course



of action. Psychiatrists rarely offer psychotherapy (talk therapy). Office visits are usually about 15 minutes. They prescribe medication based on revealed symptoms.

Psychologists generally are talk therapists with a doctorate in psychology (PsyD/Ph.D.) Sessions with clients typically run 50-60 minutes. These sessions may vary in style based on any given doctor's preferred approach. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) has statistically proven more effective for depression and anxiety than other therapy methods.

Licensed therapists may practice within specialties such as trauma or addiction. Common abbreviations you may have seen include: LMFT (Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist); LPC (Licensed Professional Counselor); LCSW (Licensed Clinical Social Worker); and LCNP (Licensed Clinical Nurse Practitioner). There are also L.P.A.s (Licensed Psychological Associates) and several others. Life Coach and Peer Support certificates alone do not include the advanced training required for therapists.

### **Christian counselors and pastors/priests**

Some believers insist they must see a Christian counselor. There are of course, different perspectives to this.

D.W. leads a ministry for pastors in need of mental health services. He said, "I would rather people see a [non-believer therapist] who knows what he is doing than a Christian who does not."

The titles Christian Counselor or Pastoral Counselor are not an automatic assumption of extensive training. Not everyone is equipped to use the Bible effectively for psychiatric or behavioral health issues.

Because a woman advertised herself as a Christian counselor, I went to see her. Within three weeks I realized her version of faith was the humanistic concept of a christ-within. We are our own saviors and deity according to her. No, that is idolatry, not authentic Christian faith which acknowledges One God, one Savior.

Except for a single time, I have sought licensed mental health professionals who follow Jesus. A secular psychiatrist was patient with my faith until I mentioned hearing from God. Then she thought I had lost touch with reality.

Both the christ-within counselor and the psychiatrist were limited because they could not understand the most important part of how I think: God's Word is my guide; honoring God is my highest goal; and listening to the leading of the Holy Spirit is imperative.

### **Your story is not over**



Her tattoo seemed meaningless. Why would anyone want a semi-colon on her upper arm? Years later, I wear a semi-colon ring.

As a punctuation mark, the semi-colon is placed where a sentence could end but the author decides to continue. For suicide attempt survivors around the world, it is a symbol of choosing to live out one's story after wanting to close the book.

Semi-colon commodities are shows of solidarity, of hope, and for

some, a reminder. We are making our stories known so you too will realize that hopelessness does not define your future. Regardless of what you may feel, hear us. Your story is not over. It is time for a new chapter.



## Dear supports

Job (pronounced jobe) lived about 4000 years ago. His story is preserved in the Bible book titled with his name.<sup>18</sup> Job's prosperity, comfort, and high standing role as judge and advisor were unmatched.

In one day, Job lost about a third of his farm animals, thousands of them, to robbery, and the rest, about 7000, to fire. Most of his farm hands were murdered by the robbers and his shepherds died in the fire. Only three men survived to tell Job what had happened.

While Job reeled from this disastrous news, a fourth man ran up.

“Master,” the servant said. “your son's house collapsed under powerful winds. All ten of your children were inside. I...I am the only survivor.”

Job sunk to the ground in a daze. As was befitting such sadness in his culture, he shaved his head, tore his clothes, and sat in ashes.

Soon he developed from head to toe a “burning ulceration” of his skin. This illness, commonly translated in the plural as boils, is singular in the original Hebrew language in which it was recorded. Most likely black leprosy, swollen open sores turned all his skin black and crusty until it eventually fell off. Job scratched at intense itching with a broken piece of pottery.

His bones deteriorated. Nightmares invaded his sleep. He struggled to eat, becoming gaunt and weak. “Just curse God and die!” his wife said in her own grief.

People who used to look up to him now mocked him. Young people dared spit in his face. The disease was contagious and incurable in Job's time so even his servant responded only when Job begged. He was humiliated and lonely.

Stripped of everything, three supports still managed to add to his suffering.



Job's friends came to visit as soon as they heard the news. Shocked, they barely recognized him. For seven days and nights they offered the kind of support we long for when feeling hopeless. In silence they sat nearby, his suffering too great for words.

Job spoke first. Anguish poured from the pit in his belly. He questioned the value of his life, wondering why he had ever been born and why God would not let him die now.

“What I always feared has happened to me. I have no rest; only trouble comes,” he said.

Immediately, one agitated friend accused him of foolish talk, dismissing his emotions as irrelevant compared to propriety.

Each piled on.

“You sound like a blustering wind.”

“Listen! God is doubtless punishing you.”

“Your children must have sinned against him, so their punishment was well deserved, too.”

Invalidation and judgment swallowed compassion whole. They continued their drivel. “Who are you to question God’s wisdom? You need to be quiet and listen to us. If you would only admit your sin, life would be happy again.”

In a cruel twist, these arguments forced the one who was suffering to defend his pain. Instead of helping or comforting, his friends dragged fragile Job across the burning sands of rejection, frustration, and emotional abandonment.

Dear supports, learn from these men. They were sorely wrong, and God said so.<sup>19</sup>

### **Why platitudes do not help**

The Great Physician and Counselor, Jesus Christ, heals with the thread of his Word. He reaches for the darkest wounds in a human soul and stitches them precisely and accurately one at a time. There, in the recesses, the Word of God is counsel and light.<sup>20</sup>

Three least helpful responses to someone feeling depressed or hopeless are anger and demand, absence, and fake cheeriness or platitudes.

Sharon inherited her childhood home, and immediately tore down the wall her mother used to bang her head against as a child.

How can telling Sharon to forgive her mother take root if shame is all she has known? Help her tear down the reminder wall first, then she can stop staring at it and listen.

Edward carries a full water bottle everywhere to subtly remind himself he is not drowning when flashbacks threaten to send him into a panic. Why would the advice to have more faith encourage him when he has never felt safe? Give him water bottles first. As fear subsides, he will hear the glad message.

Aiesha carries a list of affirmations to read when her dad's paralyzing voice creeps into her thoughts telling her she is worthless. What will she do with promises of an identity in Christ when she does not know what an identity is? Fill Aiesha's empty love tank first, then her functioning heart can learn to see the daughter God saw as he created her.



Supports dare not try to rush the healing process by making someone feel small and inadequate at feeling better. Let us not dismiss the Difference-maker's tender provision of patience, and timing.

He has the wisdom and means to retrain a crippled thought process and belief system. Meticulously and gently, he cleans out and sews up layers of hurt and unhelpful thinking at a speed each of his children can handle.

## Warning signs of suicide

From [NIMH.nih.gov](https://www.nimh.nih.gov):

The behaviors listed below may be signs that someone is thinking about suicide. If these warning signs apply to you or someone you know, get help as soon as possible, particularly if the behavior is new or has increased recently.

- Talking about wanting to die or wanting to kill themselves
- Talking about feeling empty, hopeless, or having no reason to live
- Planning or looking for a way to kill themselves, such as searching for lethal methods online, stockpiling pills, or buying a gun
- Talking about great guilt or shame
- Showing despair or suicidal themes in original artwork or music
- Talking about feeling trapped or that there are no solutions
- Feeling unbearable pain (emotional pain or physical pain)
- Talking about being a burden to others
- Using alcohol or drugs more often
- Acting anxious or agitated
- Withdrawing from family and friends
- Changing eating and/or sleeping habits
- Showing rage or talking about seeking revenge
- Taking great risks that could lead to death
- Displaying extreme mood swings, from very sad to very calm, happy
- Giving away important possessions
- Saying goodbye to friends and family
- Putting affairs in order, making a will

If you support a loved one or friend who struggles with hopelessness, it is important to access resources and information. Be prepared to support them well. Go [here](#) and [here](#).





## **Prayer to the Difference-maker**

*For the glory of your name,  
O Lord, preserve my life.  
Because of your faithfulness,  
bring me out of this distress.  
Amen.*

**Psalm 143:11**

## Practical Exercise 6: Live a little

Too depressed to move? Get involved in life in even small ways. What do you have the energy to do today? Mentally refreshing activities are therapeutic. Even baby steps are progress! Here are some ideas; make your own.

What would you be doing if you were not depressed? Do that.

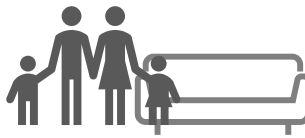
Write a to-do list and celebrate making the list!

Play music.

Set the table.

Take a shower.

Sit with the family.

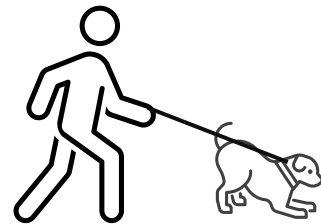


Sit up on the edge of the bed for 15 minutes 2x today

Go for a walk with a person or your dog.

Eat a healthy meal.

Attend/ participate in a support group.



Paint a picture or put a puzzle together.

Make/ Keep an appointment with your therapist or doctor.

Go to the store and say hello to people you pass.

## Next, allow hope

Think about your values as a guide. Write down what is important to you and keep the list where you can see it. Each day after, you have a choice: stick to the status quo or read the list.

Examples:

It is important to be available in a positive way for friends and family

I want to honor God

It is important I return to work/school

I want to leave a legacy of hope and not suicide

I want to be here for my pet, sibling, friend

I want to feel proud of my achievements

I want to accomplish \_\_\_\_\_

I want to experience \_\_\_\_\_



## Lower your stress

Divide tasks into smaller, more manageable parts. Your focus will shift from all that you believe you are failing to do, to a sense of achievement.

Keys to success: Make sure all the divisions are manageable.

Ask for support if needed.

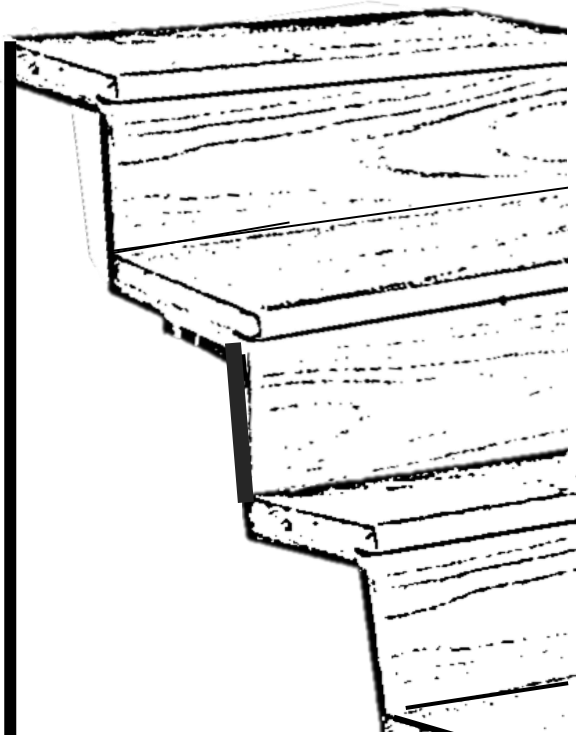
Pace yourself and continue next week.

Celebrate how far you have come!

For more ideas, visit stress management [here](#).

## Consider climbing these next few steps, bottom to top, in your search for professional help.

*If you are in crisis now, do not wait. Call 911 immediately or go to your nearest emergency room.*

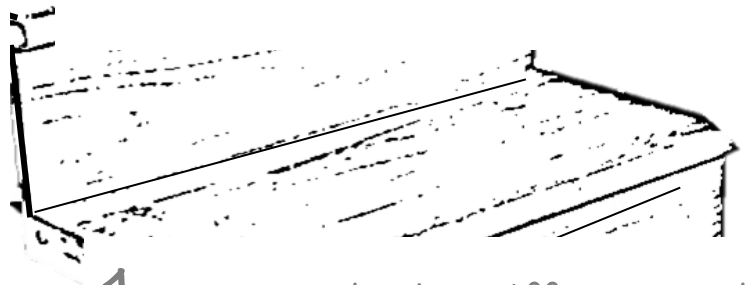


5. Feel free to switch. You are doing the hiring. Find help, not more confusion.

4. Interview therapists. Be specific about what you need. Ask a support to do the interviewing for you if you are not strong enough.

3. Get recommendations for therapists and doctors, if possible, from believers of Jesus who have received professional help. Go [here](#) for a reference page.

2. Do not use stigma to determine what method of treatment will work for you. Listen to those in-the-know.



1. Pray. Ask the Difference-maker to lead you to the right person. Keep praying, even after you are in sessions.

# 7

## *Jealousy and Envy*

*Some thoughts: Why can't I have the family he does? She has a dream job, must be nice. He's had all the advantages. I want my co-worker's car. It's not fair, I want my wife here with me! Who are these "friends" he keeps talking about?*

**T**win sisters, Jealousy and Envy, are destructive to our wellbeing. They are intrusive, obnoxious, and interfere with our peace. We do well to run the other way when we see these siblings coming!

Jealousy and Envy are not identical. Envy is the quiet sister whose eyes flit back and forth, never satisfied with who she is or what she has. Hungry for the elusive, she does not remember her own blessings. Her pursuit of happiness in a thing, person, or achievement focuses only on the future.



Envy secretly resents those who have what she wants. Hence, she cannot reflect the image of God who already owns everything. He has no reason to envy.

The sister Jealousy robs people and atmospheres of joy. For instance, she might mumble. “must be nice” if the object of her jealousy tries to share a happy story. She complains bitterly.

Jealousy acts possessively when someone she claims to love refuses her control. She makes threats and seeks vengeance. Often suspicious, energized by insecurity, jealousy is nicknamed a green-eyed monster for good reason.

The Lord said this about himself. “Do not worship any other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.”<sup>1</sup> The word jealous in this verse in the original written language refers only to God. There is no resemblance to human jealousy which is severely flawed.

God’s jealousy is holy. He is jealous for us (not of us) because we give our devotion to things that offer no hope. He is not in a rivalry over our souls because he has no rival. He is not jealous of another god because he is the Only True God. He simply wants his people to honor him, to stay in the relationship.

Unfortunately, jealousy in the human form is unproductive. According to James, “Where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.”<sup>2</sup> King Solomon also warned, “A heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones.”<sup>3</sup>

### **Run for your life from the sisters**

People are lost in the peripheral when we zero in on what they have. Are we more drawn to the bling in a home or to the person who invited us there?

Do we hear what someone is saying, or plot how to sound smarter?

Are we glad for the friend who has what we want, or do we sit back in bitterness?

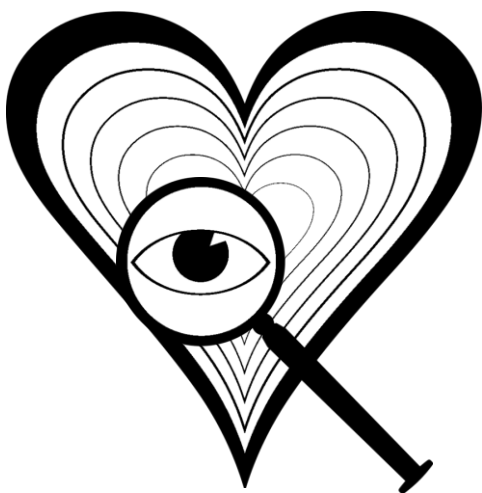
Jealousy and Envy isolate us emotionally, keeping us too busy comparing to care. Unable to give love fully, we cannot receive it, either.

Humility, Willingness, and Love are the Difference-maker's bouncers, ready to prevent thoughts of jealousy and envy from overshadowing our joy.

## **Humility**

The word humble means to dismiss self-reliance and become fully-dependent on God, according to the original written language of the New Testament.

Joe burned with anger so deep he thought it would kill him. He cried out to God for vengeance and relief from the cause of his pain. The Holy Spirit nudged him toward humble willingness. Finally, Joe prayed, "Lord, change me."



Like Joe, humility takes responsibility for one's heart and refrains from casting blame everywhere else. Joe was happy to discover his anger gone within a few days, replaced by mercy.

Humility gives us that freedom to examine ourselves, unafraid to set denial aside. Self-protection cannot

compare to God's great love. Once aware of our need for mercy and his forgiveness, we can offer it to others.

Paul challenged his readers. "In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death — even death on a cross!"<sup>4</sup>

**Willingness** is slippery. It can be emotional and reactionary, reluctant and resigned, or surrendered and devoted. Willingness is proven by action.

A man had two sons. He went to the first and said, "Son, go and work today in the vineyard."

"I will not," the boy answered. Nonetheless, he soon changed his mind and obeyed his father.

The man went to his second son and requested he go to the vineyard to work. This boy answered, "I will, sir," and never went.

Jesus told the above parable<sup>5</sup> to challenge stuffy holier-than-thou religious leaders whose claims to know God were at odds with their unacceptance of God's Son. They were like the boy who said yes and did not follow through.

Meanwhile, society's unreligious outcasts were coming to Jesus. Like the first son, they changed their minds and began doing what the heavenly Father asks of us.



Thankfully, the Difference-maker is working to change us from the inside-out, to grow our willingness so we can join him in his good purposes.<sup>6</sup>

**Love** is described best in what many call *The Love Chapter*<sup>7</sup> in the Bible. We learn first that love is kind. Love celebrates with those who are glad and aches alongside people who are in sorrow.<sup>8</sup>



We will never find the selfish sisters Jealousy and Envy truly sharing in a person's joy. Instead, they smile and squeak out terse congratulations, while sincere love stands proud of the accomplishments and blessings of others, unafraid of their success.

Neither do the sisters grieve for the sake of another's heart. In worst case scenarios, jealousy and envy are glad when people who seem to have better lives, suffer.

Continuing with the definition of love, we see it does not envy or boast; it is not proud. God said, "Let not the wise boast of their wisdom or the strong boast of their strength or the rich boast of their riches but let the one who boasts boast about this: that they have the understanding to know me, that I am the LORD who

exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight.”<sup>9</sup>

Love is not rude. It respectfully honors others instead of focusing on selfish ambition. Love always protects, so gossip and assumptions are not part of our conversations.

Love is patient, not easily angered. It is not delighted with the failings and miseries of people who do wrong, so it does not compile bitter records. Instead, love trusts and hopes.

Trust and hope are not the same as denial and duplicity. Love celebrates all truth, even uneasy truth. Love perseveres but does not enable addiction, abuse, or other sins. Real love is tough.

Too often, the term love is equated with sex or a temporary high of delight. “If you love me, you’ll sleep with me” is manipulative as is, “if you make me happy, I will love you.” These sentiments are proud, dishonoring, self-seeking, unkind, and unprotective.

Love built on what is given to us or how someone makes us feel, has no foundation and teeters on whether we tire of the gifts and how soon those warm fuzzy feelings wear off. The love of God is not dependent on superficial beauty or favors. His love never fails.

### **Take those eyes off the world**

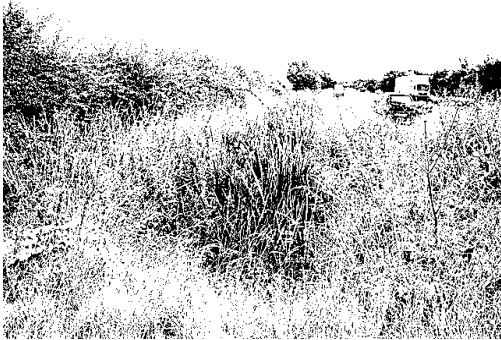
Jesus said, “Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world.”<sup>10</sup>

Humility of attitude, willingness to act, and sincere love do not stare at what only might be.

Picture a lawn overrun by weeds.

1. Humility realizes the lawn is not so beautiful and no bragging rights are appropriate.
2. Willingness pulls the weeds.
3. It is love that kills the weeds' roots and plants fresh seed.

When those weeds growing in our thoughts are jealousy and envy, the same principle applies.



The purveyor of love whose very nature is love, the Difference-maker, fills us with his perfect brand of love. We lose the need to control or pursue persons, to drag love out of resistant relationships, or to chase after what we think might please us next. Our eyes turn from what we do not have

and lift toward heaven in gratitude for what God has so generously given.

Paul admitted, “At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy.”<sup>11</sup>

We have much for which to be thankful! Gratitude is our escape from the sisters.



## **Prayer to the Difference-maker**

*Thank You, Jesus, because you  
died for everyone so that we  
who receive your new life will  
no longer live for ourselves. I  
want to be one who lives for  
You, Christ Jesus, because You  
died and were raised for me...*

**Based on 2 Corinthians 15**

## Practical Exercise 7: Act Opposite

To keep jealousy and envy from overtaking your relationship with God and thought life, act opposite to how you feel. Disappointment triggers jealous and envious thoughts. What step can you take in the opposite direction?

### Example Thought:      Example Opposite Action:

She has more friends than I

Nurture friendship in your life. Make one phone call; go to one church service or social event; learn to be a good friend. Reach out to her in kindness.

He is more successful and respected than I

Do something of value to earn respect; speak kind words to and about him; work on honest ways to improve your success.

They have more money; I want some of that

Pay extra on 1 debt; raise your income; thank God those people are comfortable and not hungry or cold. Pray for more blessings for them.

They come from a good family

Compliment their family, pray for them. As much as it is up to you, make peace in your family. Fill your life with good people.

He goes out without me

If he is an honest man, trust him. Talk with him about his friends (no interrogating!) Plan to go out with your friends the same nights.

Other guys look at her.

Be the kind of man that does not check out other women; trust her; realize that your jealousy is doing harm.

## **Next, do the amazing**

What if you did something so shocking it amazes even you? What if you went so counter-cultural as to defeat love for the world's things?

If you will do it, this challenge will shake your world and grow your heart.

1. Give the best of what you have to someone who needs it more or to a charity such as The Salvation Army. That shirt or pair of shoes you just bought and have not worn yet? Donate that. The money you saved for a new, shiny something? Give that to someone in need or donate it to your local foodbank.
2. Write down what you wish to own. If it is affordable, buy it for someone else. Expect nothing in return.

### **Change the script**

When we are passed up, held back, or receive unwarranted criticism, it is easy to feel sorry for ourselves. Instead of running *woulda-if-only* on a loop, how about making the situation into a game?

Each time you feel put down, send five kind and encouraging texts, emails, or letters to anyone you want. Consider people who do not receive much company. Send thanks to postal carriers, cooks, and maintenance crews.

In this way, those opportunities for jealousy and envy become high points of joy and love instead.


**These ideas are radical. Will you try?**

# 8

## *Destructive Blame*

*Some thoughts: My childhood was dysfunctional so I cannot succeed. If it weren't for so-n-so I would be happy right now. You make the decisions-it is your fault if I do not like them. People make me lose my temper. I will not trust God because church-goers are hypocrites.*

*Some thoughts: My neighbor's dog bit me but it's my fault for leaving the house. My marriage might have worked if I'd done everything better. My boss threw a clipboard because I am a disappointment. I should have been a better child then I would not have been abused.*



**N**ow we have met the sisters, let me introduce the Destructive brothers, Blame, and his other brother, Blame. These two are fishermen with strange styles.



Blame 1 is a confused fisherman who seems to miss the point. Casting generous portions of blame in every direction, it does not matter to him where it lands. He does not fish with a hook. It is not his intention to catch anything that might end up back in his boat.

Blame 1 had a difficult past, and it is fair to empathize with that. However, he will not review options. He refuses to accept his power to change. His style of fishing is best described as *cast, cast, and cast*.

Blame 2 is quirkiest still. He owns a boat, but it is so full of catches that it will no longer float. So, he swims, grabs what he can, and drags it back to shore.

Trouble is, he does not catch healthy fish, but rather the blame his brother is doling out. Blame 2 collects it, stores it, and never casts any of it away. His style of fishing is, *collect whatever floats*.

Blame 2 has also had a tough life. It is appropriate to care about his pains. However, like his brother Blame 1, he is not very open to change.

While toxic shame does not let go of mistakes, destructive blame is about shifting responsibility.

## **Casting Blame**

Casting blame transfers responsibility anywhere except on personal poor choices. This is frequently blatantly obvious.

A man questioned a tax consultant about concerns related to his 2020 stimulus check from the government. He had left his first wife and children and started a new family. Where was his second check? “Doesn’t the President know I have another family to care for?”

The tax consultant’s reply was crisp. “You alone are responsible...”



Tam came to town for a funeral and claimed to be low on cash. We were strangers, and seeing her plight, I invited her stay in my home for two to three days. One week later, with a days-long headache and nerves already jumping over the edge, I dropped her off at the airport.

Decades ago, she had moved several states away from her family. On her first visit in years, she screamed obscenities at them over her phone, for hours a day. This was only a few feet from my home office, hence the headache. She spread lies among her relatives, to me, to a mutual friend, and to my pastor.

What I heard was her avoiding responsibility. Casting blame feels good in the moment because it instantly relieves shame and accountability. It is not sustainable.

One reason casting blame is depressive is that the blamer must work harder and harder at rationalizing or denying personal mistakes and wrongdoings. Depression perhaps is no surprise when a pattern of bold-face lying becomes too heavy a load.

Blame conveniently pushes the burden of change elsewhere. A blamer can rest in the familiarity of pain although it is their chief complaint. In this way, casting blame is an efficient means of skipping guard duty over one's wellbeing.

*Casting blame  
is an efficient  
means of  
skipping  
guard duty  
over one's  
wellbeing.*

“Fools make fun of guilt...” King Solomon wrote.<sup>1</sup> John explains,

“If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves.”<sup>2</sup>

Waiting for the world to adjust to our wishes shields us from seeing flaws in our attitude and behavior. This is what blame does, form a blinder around our minds until we are barely free to understand the truth.

Like Blame 1 cannot leave his boat, casting blame keeps us stuck.

### **Blaming God**

High School senior Jarrad sees himself as a class clown, consistently and excessively talking throughout his classes both in-person and online, until everyone is laughing. His online teachers try muting him and he resorts to physical antics.

With his screen darkened to other students, Jarrad texts them during class. Finally, the principal steps in with a warning; stop it or earn suspension.

Jarrad’s behavior does not improve. One month later, he returns to class with more disruptive hilarity, often at the expense of teachers.

His parents are aware and have dealt with their son. However, they work all day and Jarrad shrugs off their discipline. Expulsion is the last resort. What other options remain for the school?



Jarrad's refusal to change his rebellious ways eventually brings about his separation from those who try to help. The school system, teachers, principal, and Jarrad's parents have not abandoned him. While leaders give him multiple opportunities to maintain his education, Jarrad will not have it.

God does not throw us away, either. We have the power to detach from him and his influence at great personal cost. Our insistence on rebellion weakens the relationship and eventually separates us from him. Our sins hide his face so that he will not hear.<sup>3</sup>

All too often, "a person's own foolishness leads to their ruin, yet their heart rages against the Lord," said Solomon.<sup>4</sup> Blaming God for difficulties resulting from our poor decisions is futile.<sup>5</sup> Our ungodly desires (thoughts) entice and drag us into sinful acts. If we allow sin to blossom and grow large in our life, it gives birth to death.<sup>6</sup> Relationships, occupations, reputations, opportunities, and lives are at risk.

God disciplines us for our good.<sup>7</sup> Like a child who learned in the principal's office not to throw an eraser at her teacher a second time (excuse me while I clear my throat), if it takes hardship to get our attention, he will allow it. This kind of pain is a blessing because in his patience, he never stops calling us or loving us back to life. Solomon wrote, "Do not be upset when he corrects you. For the LORD corrects those he loves."<sup>8</sup>

### **Our choices affect other people**

Jarrad's regular interruptions slow classes down, affect the authority of teachers, and frustrate serious students. His expulsion is in part for the sake of everyone else's education.

God's hand of discipline on our heads may be for the protection and blessing of other people, too. Rebellion hurts our parents' feelings.<sup>9</sup> Acts of foolishness harm society.<sup>10</sup>

The commandments to not commit adultery, murder, steal, and the rest,<sup>11</sup> are summed up in "Love your neighbor as yourself."<sup>12</sup> Love does no harm!<sup>13</sup>

### **Our choices affect our blessings**

If I pray for you to be blessed, I am asking God to show you his divine favor. *Blessed* is often equated with happiness, contentment, or joy.

Jarrad is missing out on a good education that we all know would grant him more options in the future. In a similar way, we take a pass on the greatest blessings from heaven by choosing to focus on temporary feel-good moments. Selfishness never fulfills us.

The Bible says, "Blessed are those..."

- who are poor in spirit (devoid of spiritual arrogance);
- who grieve;
- who are gentle;
- who hunger and thirst for integrity, purity, and rightness of thinking;
- who are merciful;
- who are the peacemakers;
- who are persecuted for righteousness' sake<sup>14</sup>
- who are kind to the poor<sup>15</sup>
- who are not offended by Jesus<sup>16</sup>
- whose disobedience is forgiven;
- whose lives are lived in complete honesty<sup>17</sup>
- whose hope is in the Lord their God<sup>18</sup>

## Our choices affect spiritual productivity and growth

Jesus compared himself to a grapevine, God the Father to a gardener, and us to branches. God prunes, that is trims back, spiritually healthy branches so they will produce even more spiritually healthy fruit.<sup>19</sup>

Sometimes this process stings although there is no fear of condemnation.<sup>20</sup> God is developing in us, in increasing measure, his loving practices.<sup>21</sup>

Like a tree or grapevine, what we produce will prove our nature. We know Jarrad is not exemplifying personal honor or concern for others. If he allows God to change his thinking, he will still struggle to win back people's trust and support.<sup>22</sup>



## Our choices affect our eternal reward

The Olympics were a big deal in ancient Greece where they first organized the competition. Winners received crowns made from plants. Of course, these shriveled up quickly.



Paul spoke of a crown that will not wither. Comparing the games and victory crowns to a spiritual race, he said, “They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize.”<sup>24</sup>

The crown of life is the reward that God has promised to those who love him.<sup>25</sup> Paul says, “I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us.”<sup>26</sup>

Bearing in mind all the self-destructive choices we make, why do we blame the Difference-maker when life does not meet our expectations?

### **Collecting misdirected blame**

Straight up, let us admit that innumerable circumstances and consequences causing our suffering *are* the fault of others. This includes terrible acts people commit against us and how we feel emotionally or physically at that moment.

We develop false guilt by accepting accountability for events out of our control. Once an adult, what we choose to take in is up to us. We are not helpless.

A tyrannical boss catches every one of his personal assistant's mistakes and invents a few too. He enjoys verbally abusing Mari by berating and mocking her in front of other employees. He does not have to accept responsibility for his decisions gone wrong because of his convenient scape goat.

Facing this each day creates an atmosphere in which Mari begins to question herself. *Maybe I am clumsy and nit-witted. I did not remember to fetch the folder he demanded. I misspelled a client's name.*

Often, misdirected blame is dotted with just enough truth to make it difficult to weed out.

Mari did make a mistake. True.

She has made more than one mistake. True.

She is accused of other mistakes. True.

She is responsible for anything beyond her actual mistakes. False.

She blames herself for her boss's abuse. This is false guilt.

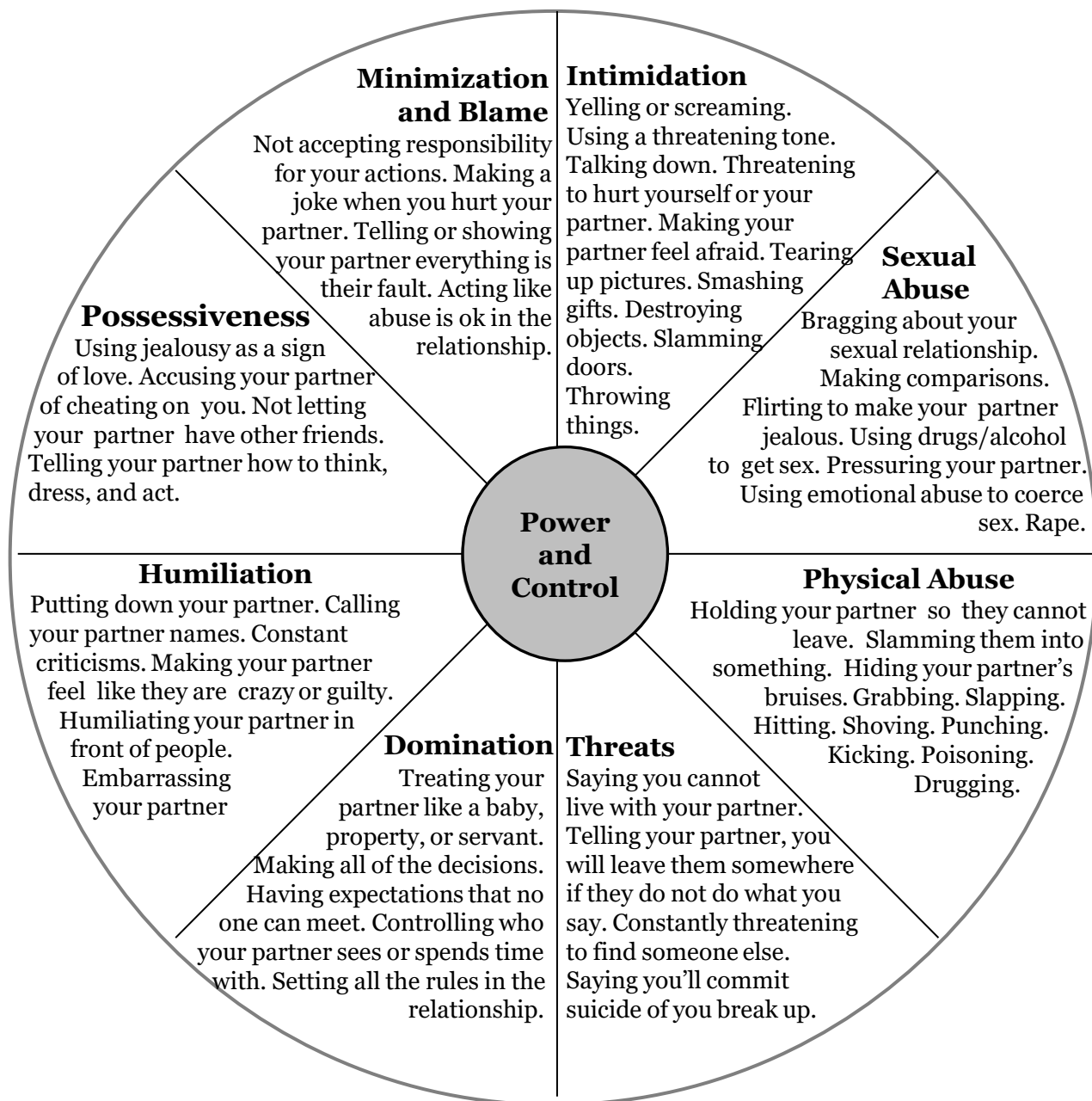
## **Abuse**

Abuse is taking advantage of someone who is physically, emotionally, psychologically, intellectually, or in some way unable to stop the abuse. In Mari's case, at first, she is unable to stop the verbal abuse because she would lose her job.

A woman like Mari, who is beginning to believe she is worthy of harsh reprimand, needs some psychological support to recognize the manipulative lies of her boss. She is too full of self-doubt to meaningfully stand up for herself.

Every form of abuse is about power and control. Abusers blame, lie,

and manipulate to gain and maintain control over their target. As consummate actors, their public appearance is misleading. If caught or accused, they know how to cry, or they cry because they are not getting their way. In religious settings, they know the language of the faith and will use it to sound repentant. Apologies are unspecific unless they parrot the accuser.





In this secret climate, misdirected blame is part of the abuse. The spoken or unspoken threat is that the target will look like a liar if the truth comes out.

Sadly, it happens. This is one of many complicated reasons targets may not leave their abusers soon or at all.

*Every form of  
abuse is about  
power and  
control... Abusers  
make their  
decision to abuse.  
Period.*

Abuse is always, yes, always, the fault, full responsibility, and sin of the abuser.

Gross misrepresentations of an abuse victim's role are spoken in ignorance. *He should have fought back. She wasn't dressed right. He pushed her buttons. She was nagging him. He should have met curfew. She shouldn't have mouthed off.*

Abusers make their decision to abuse. Period.

If you or someone you know is in an abusive situation, go to [this list to find help](#).

### **Make true and empowering statements**

Create personal statements. Examples:

- A. I cannot control what other people choose to say or do. It is not my job to fix every circumstance.

B. I refuse to carry blame for the crime committed against me or my family. Only the criminal did wrong. I did what I was capable of doing at the moment which is the best anyone can do in any situation.

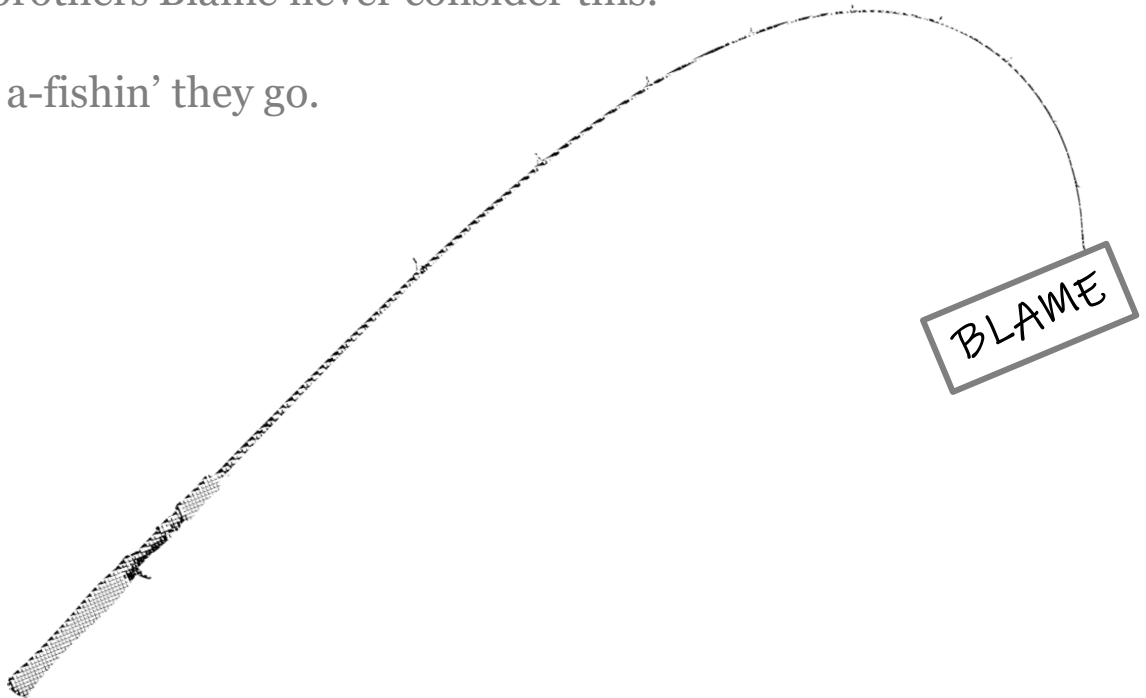
C. I will not take on the burden of guilt for my friend's addiction. I cannot save or fix her. No one can. She is responsible for seeking help and not just begging me for money or a place to stay.

D. I do not accept the abuser's lies that I brought on the abuse. I will not hate the child or victim-adult I once was for allowing what I had little power to stop.

Whether casting blame or collecting misdirected blame, the option to reach out for fresh perspective and guidance from the Difference-maker is always available.

The brothers Blame never consider this.

And, a-fishin' they go.



## **Prayer to the Difference-maker**

*The purposes of a person's heart  
are deep waters,  
but one who has insight  
draws them out.*

*Please Lord, I need your insight  
to draw out my motives and  
the deep injuries of my soul,  
so I can understand and change.*

**Based on Proverbs 20:5**

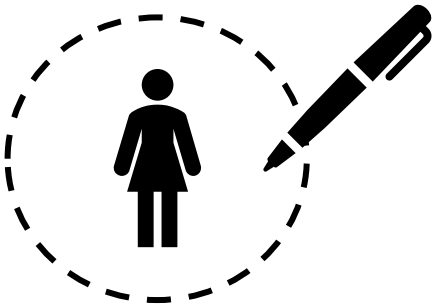
## Practical Exercise 8: Find harmony



### When you blame someone:

1. Choose harmony. Make a quality decision to find it and peace of mind.
2. The most loving spouses and friends are those who take the time to study their companion and without criticism, show appreciation for the good they see. Start by taking notice.
3. Start a gratitude journal, writing prayers of thanks to God for what you have.
4. Notice too how others suffer. Especially those you may blame, pay attention to their pain. Do not try to “fix” anyone.
5. Pray for blessings for those you blame.
6. At this point, you can realize, everyone, including yourself, has made mistakes that hurt someone else. Choose to forgive as much as God has forgiven you.

## Next, draw a circle around yourself



## When you accept false blame:

Boundaries are not about stopping another person (we have no control over them). Boundaries are about what we allow into our circle.

Do the following exercise, then create your own.

Teen Calvin blames you because he cannot find his shoes. How do you respond?

1. Let him stay home from school
2. Frantically help him find his shoes
3. Say, "I'm sorry, I failed to pick them up last night."
4. Buy him new shoes
5. Yell at him
6. Let him find his shoes and be late to school
7. Talk with him later about your boundaries and his grounding
8. Send him to school in whatever shoes are available



What will you allow in your circle?

Numbers 1-5 cause problems for you and do nothing to address Calvin's behavior.

Numbers 6-8 can be healthier boundaries. These leave responsibility for his shoes on Calvin. He is accountable for the consequences of losing them.

What about a situation in your life?

# 9

## *Perceived Dependency*

*Some thoughts: If no one pushes me I cannot succeed. He says he loves me after he hits me, and I cannot be without him. This has been a tough day already; I need a drink. I'll feel happy only if this job interview goes my way. His approval keeps me going. She'll leave if I do not stay sick.*



*D*ear Creeper,

You are my perceived dependency. You have toyed with me since I was young. I played the game of hide and seek innocently, believing you and the powerful forces that drove me to you were normal and right. I did not understand you are a creeper.

Your presence seemed a kind gift, an experience for which I was grateful. Slow and sure, you built a temple for yourself in my brain.

One day I witnessed the ruin of another of your confused devotees and began to fear you. Confidence grew in my power to go on alone. Nonetheless, your cajoling stirred memories of when we first met, and soon your promises of the hour defeated caution.

*I  
cared  
only  
for  
how  
you  
made  
me  
feel*

Your lies were soft and comfortable. Eventually I believed everything you offered for my protection. No one could persuade me you were not my *best friend*.

Remember how I used to panic when you were not in sight? Vigorous denial kept me from seeing what was happening; I cared only for how you made me feel.

Oh, but I see you now, my enemy! Perceived Dependency, you have never been a friend. Joining hands with you in my destruction was a game of Russian Roulette with unpredictable consequences.

So-called dependency was but another deception; I could have been free! To be honest, until now you have been my choice. I am changing my mind.

You see, there is someone real taking your place. He is the Difference-maker, the Highest Power who is always for me and never against me.

I could say it's not you it's me, but this break-up is all about running away from you and into the arms of God.

Goodbye from Not-Your-Victim,

*Compulsive Liar*      *Obsessive*      *Workaholic*      *Gamblin' man*  
*Eating Disordered*      *Approval-Seeker*      *Alcoholic*  
*Defeatist*      *Substance User*      *Pornography User*  
*Sex Addict*      *Co-dependent*      *Money-hungry*  
*Anything for sympathy*



## **Our masters**

Nothing is easy about a perceived dependency. Nothing. Day to day life is complicated by maneuvers around the belief that what we need most is missing.

A perceived dependency is the act of giving our power freely to an outside force, that once given such authority becomes our master, source, motivation, and excuse.

Stone and wood statues all over the world are praised and offered gifts to appease whatever god they represent. That is literal idol worship. Jesus expanded the concept to include anything that stands between us and full devotion to the One True God. An idol then, is anything or anyone we think we cannot live without other than God.

Perceived dependencies are our masters. Not only are they a type of idol, but they are also futile. No person can meet all our needs. No substance satisfies for long. Compulsions heap unhappy consequences on an already stressful life. Obsessions overrule good judgment. Yet we obey them when they call.

Perceived dependency unloads barrels of disappointment on the human spirit. We create mental scenarios of rescue and *if only* delusions. Who will make me happy? What will bring relief? We are completely at the mercy of our perceived dependencies unless we take our power back.



## Evie and Tony

Evie lives in denial. As a heroin addict, her behaviors are more predictable than she is aware. She is a sweet daughter and loving mother when sober. When she is using, everyone runs for cover. Her language is vile and abusive. She tries to manipulate her daughter for money.

Only one year ago, Evie graduated from long-term residential treatment. She held down a job and visited with her young children. She did not separate herself from old companions and sadly, relapse came as no surprise to her hopeful and wary family. Evie sacrifices for her obsession all that makes life worth living, causing great pain in her wake.

Tony's longing for love and overwhelming fear of rejection has welded his self-made cage shut. He leans heavily on his wife to reassure him with constant agreement. Opposing opinions threaten his sense of security, so he never asks for her real thoughts.

His perceived dependency is the submission of his wife and others while he takes no emotional risks. It is clear in this scenario Tony sold his personal power at the cost of true love. His wife is captive also if she plays by his rules.

The sad chaos of Evie's and Tony's lives is why the words of the prophet Isaiah make sense. He said we feed on ashes by looking to an idol to meet our needs. A deluded heart misleads us. To our detriment we fail to question, "Is not this thing in my right hand a lie?"<sup>1</sup>



## **Then there is Rhona**

Lifting her head from the toilet and sinking to the all too familiar floor, Rhona knew her eating disorder owned her and could end her life. She was desperate for freedom.

Someone introduced her to a 12-step program of recovery. Though a meeting was an hour away, Rhona determinedly and faithfully traveled to join-in. Older members supported her through tears and triumph. Eventually, she gained her life back.

She does not consider herself free to eat whatever she wants. Instead, she is free to choose carefully what will keep her healthy. No longer do certain foods send her spiraling, because she avoids them completely. She will carry safe foods with her to family gatherings and other events.

Rhona is not a compulsive dieter; her choices are a matter of life and death. Thirty years after entering recovery, she still attends meetings.

Dr. Rhona Epstein became one of the very few experts in food addiction and serves as a psychologist helping as many as she can. Her book [\*Food Triggers\*](#) is beneficial to any one of us who struggle with compulsive behaviors around food.

*Any willingness to be open to a spiritual solution is a start. -Dr. Epstein*

## Superpower

Each of us is gifted with a superpower. Do the following five quotes by Jesus reveal it to you?

“If you want...” 1.5

“Anyone who chooses...” 2

“...if you do not believe...” 3

“If you hold to my teaching...” 4

“...you were not willing.”<sup>5</sup>



Yes! God has graciously created us with the remarkable power of choice. Why do we so often risk its loss?



My son finally convinced me to watch the Marvel series. All of it. I have learned that imaginary superheroes struggle to learn how and when to use their power.

Decision-making is not so simple for us, either. Opting to break away from a perceived dependency is not as straightforward as Captain America tossing his shield at a villain and knocking him flat!

It is doable! Remember, intent does not mean instant success. The first step, each day, is the main one.

Have you survived difficult challenges? If yes, why not again?  
Have other people recovered? Why not you?

## **Relapse**

The difference between Evie, Tony and Rhona is that Rhona learned to wield her power of choice in her favor. Ask anyone with broken chains, freedom requires complete honesty, support, and connection to strength greater than ours.

Some say relapse is inevitable. No, but it is common. We return to old destructive habits when we have not permanently structured our goals around something more meaningful. I relapsed with my eating disorder with a long list of excuses. My health coach reminds me to see recovery as an investment in what I want to achieve.

Ultimately, it is finding and living in purpose that brings joy. With what will we fill our lives, so our obsessions no longer have room in our heads?

## **Surrender**

I mentioned to a woman with a secular belief system that it is a privilege to be used by God. Her negative reaction makes sense because my word choice, “used by,” was skewed.

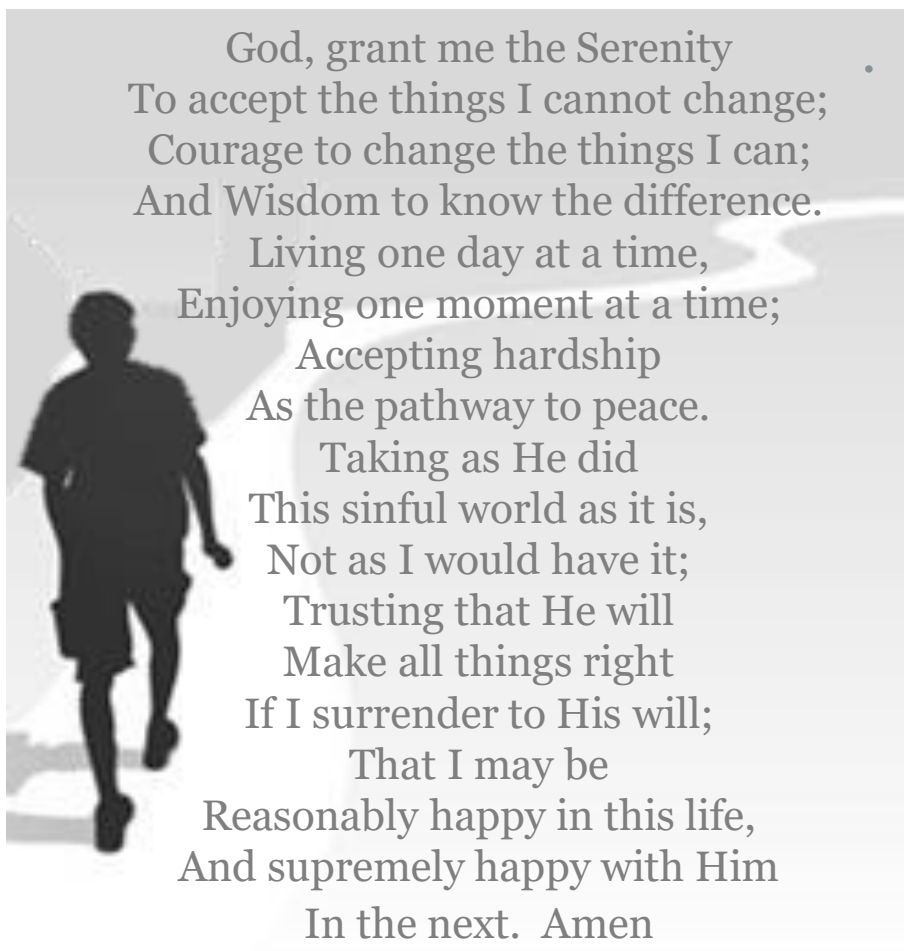
It is fairer to say I am one of God’s volunteers among many. None of us have had our will removed. By faith and experience we know his ways are best. The more we grasp that, the more we want to do for him. Here’s the clincher: we love him because he loves us. Yes, it is a privilege and source of joy when the Difference-maker works through us to help others in some way.

Surrender comes with the understanding that God has more than

single person's best interests in mind. In that regard, he asks us to extend his mercy, love, and truth when we might rather sit at home in comfort.

Should we say yes, we will find he is working everything out for our good, too. In his will (as discussed in chapter 2), we experience deep satisfaction. As always, the Difference-maker's approach is more profound and effective than the world's wisest philosophies.<sup>5.5</sup>

The complete Serenity Prayer, famous for the shortened version used in 12-step groups, points to such surrender.



## But God

Accounts throughout the Bible of God's interactions with humans prove he is the Highest Power. At the end of their resources, people saw God change everything.

The entire earth flooded: **But God** remembered Noah <sup>6</sup>

Jacob's boss cheated him: "**But God** has seen your abuse" <sup>7</sup>

Joseph's brothers sold him: "...**but God** intended it for good" <sup>8</sup>

King Saul hunted him down: ...**but God** [helped him escape]<sup>9</sup>

People tried to kill Paul: "**But God** has protected me" <sup>10</sup>

Epaphroditus was ill, and almost died. **But God** had mercy on him<sup>11</sup>

Jesus was nailed to a cross: **But God** raised him from the dead <sup>12</sup>

We are lost for eternity: **But God** demonstrates his own love...<sup>13</sup>

Apostles had... fears within. "**But God**... comforted us"<sup>14</sup>

Helplessness is not always a fact; it is a belief. Through Jeremiah God said, "If you wanted to return to me, you could. You could throw away your detestable idols and stray away no more."<sup>15</sup> He knows how much power is available to us if we will ask.



Surrender to the will of God is ultimately the cure to compulsive, addictive behaviors. That does not mean it is easy, nor does it guarantee no relapses. Jesus said, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.”<sup>16</sup> He is our healer; perhaps we do well to follow his prescription.

Let us remember together, whatever condition we are in, however deeply we are stuck in perceived dependency, we do not actually need the person, activity, substance, or compulsion we are focused on to survive or thrive. Our dependence is but a perception. We can depend on and trust the Highest Power.

Whom have I in heaven but you?  
And earth has nothing I desire besides you.  
My flesh and my heart may fail,  
but God is the strength of my heart  
and my portion forever.<sup>17</sup>

“But God...”

**Recommended:**

*The Life Recovery Bible* is special. It is the Holy Bible in its entirety, with sidebars relating specific scriptures to recovery. These address emotional issues, trauma, support, and much more. In addition, the *Life Recovery Journal* takes the reader through the 12-step process.

## **Prayer to the Difference-maker**

*Please keep me from deliberate  
sins! Don't let them control me.  
Then I will be free of guilt and  
innocent of great sin.*

*May the words of my mouth  
and the meditation of my heart  
be pleasing to you, O LORD, my  
Rock and my Redeemer.*

**Psalm 19:13-14**



## Practical Exercise 9: Now What?

### Do you have a problem?

What am I thinking about when I wake and go to sleep?

Do I remember what my child/friend/or spouse said?

Do I plot ways to get to my fix?

Do I hide this obsession?

Take this **free, anonymous, online test** to see if you might have a dependency or addiction. NOTE: This is not a diagnostic tool.

<https://www.online-therapy.com/addiction/test>

### Spell it out

Write a letter (or letters) to your perceived dependency. *Do not mail it* if it is a person.



Tell it goodbye or yell at it. Write out all it has stolen and what freedom will bring. This is about you, not casting blame.

Write letters to God too. Prayers, questions, confession, praise, and gratitude are helpful concepts to write about. Your letter is to a real God who will not only see what you write, but who knows your heart.

### Read Romans

Romans chapter 6, part of a letter from Paul to believers in Rome, is directly applicable to dependencies and freedom from them. I highly urge you to take it in.

## **Next, find a strong support system**



**Cultivate a network of healthy friends.** Observe over time who is healthy-minded, test them for honesty and the ability to hold your confidences. Watch them with other people. Choose friends wisely.

Find a support group with nonjudgmental people who have seen your struggle before and will not be shocked.

### **Christian faith-based 12-Step programs and lay-supports**

[OvercomersOutreach.org](http://OvercomersOutreach.org) 12-step groups

<http://www.celebraterecovery.com/> Recovery program

<https://www.myhopeforaddiction.com/> Recovery support

<https://mentalhealthgracealliance.org> Mental health support

### **Traditional 12-Step Anonymous groups**

<http://www.aa.org> Alcoholics Anonymous

<https://ca.org/> Cocaine Anonymous

<https://coda.org/> Codependency Anonymous

<https://cgaa.info/> Computer Gaming Addiction Anonymous

<https://clutterersanonymous.org/> Clutterers Anonymous

<https://www.crystalmeth.org/> Crystal Meth Anonymous

<http://www.debtorsanonymous.org> Debtors Anonymous

<http://www.draonline.org> Dual Recovery Anonymous

<http://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org> Eating Disorders

<http://emotionsanonymous.org/> Emotions Anonymous

<http://www.gamblersanonymous.org/ga> Gamblers Anonymous

[heroinanonymous.org](http://heroinanonymous.org) Heroin Anonymous

<https://marijuana-anonymous.org/> Marijuana Anonymous

<https://www.na.org/> Narcotics Anonymous



<https://www.nicotine-anonymous.org/> Nicotine Anonymous

<https://oa.org> Overeaters Anonymous

<https://www.pillsanonymous.org/> Pills Anonymous

<http://www.selfmutilatorsanonymous.org> Self-Mutilators Anon.

<http://www.sa.org> Sexaholics Anonymous

<http://www.spenders.org/> Spenders Anonymous

[underearnersanonymous.org](http://underearnersanonymous.org) Underearners Anonymous

<https://www.workaholics-anonymous.org/> Workaholics Anonymous

### **Treatment Centers and Rehab guidance**

[www.findtreatment.samhsa.gov](http://www.findtreatment.samhsa.gov) Information on Hotlines and treatment options in your state. 1-800-662-HELP (4357) Helpline

<http://www.nbcnews.com/feature/> *How to Find a Good Drug Treatment Program and Avoid Bad Ones*


[www.lighthouse.network.org](http://www.lighthouse.network.org) A National Helpline for finding faith-based mental health services in the U.S.A. 1.844.543.3242

<https://www.help.org/choosing-the-right-rehab-facility> How to choose the right and affordable rehab facility.

# 10

## *Fear*

*Some thoughts: I promised to attend the meeting, but since I'll make a fool of myself, I'm not going. There is no way to know if I can stay safe. I do not like people different from me. Things are going to get worse. I'm sure he hates me.*



**F**ear leads to depressive thinking when we give it authority. Fear develops under a threat, real or perceived, to our wellbeing or the wellbeing of another person.

As a mere emotion, fear is not a sign of weak character, nor does it signal failure of faith. The bravest people are those who feel fear and face it even in small ways. Courage is measured by genuine effort, not success or the size of payout. Baby steps toward facing or overcoming any fear are indeed applaudable steps!

### **Not every courageous person looks like one**

Examples of courage:

- Elderly people venturing out despite impatient drivers and ridiculous younger people talking down to them
- Children returning to the same school each day where they are taunted or bullied
- Families of faith around the world persecuted by authorities
- People in suicidal despair reconnecting with living

- Those living with disability
- Those going to work with anxiety, migraines, fatigue...
- Women who leave abusive homes and often face judgment
- The caretaker of elderly parents

And the inspirational list goes on...

Facing fear is a choice that mimics the life of our Savior.<sup>1</sup> He loved (far) beyond his comfort zone. The author of Hebrews wrote, "Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart."<sup>2</sup>

*He  
adds,  
"I am  
with  
you,"  
and  
stays.*

God does not whip out a chill, "don't be afraid" and disappear.<sup>3</sup> He adds, "I am with you,"<sup>4</sup> and stays. Brave people learn from their less-than-brave mistakes (we have all done them). With him at our side, we move forward, following the Difference-maker's plan for overcoming fear.

### **God chooses unlikely heroes**

Abigail<sup>5</sup> was beautiful and intelligent. Married, whether by choice or arrangement we do not know, her role was to manage her wealthy household with its many servants and obligations, serve her husband, Nabal, and presumably have his children.



Nabal, wise in his own eyes and not in many others, well lived up to his name which meant fool. Filled with greed, his harsh demeanor in business and at home proved his self-centeredness. No doubt he enjoyed his meanness and the fear of those around him.

In those days (about 1100 BC), sheep and goats were money and often stolen. Soon to be king, warrior David was on the run from his insanely jealous father-in-law, King Saul. David and his army of six-hundred men earned what they needed to survive by protecting the livestock of various towns and farms.

It was customary and expected for wealthy landowners to offer provisions to such protectors. Nonetheless, when David sent the message to Nabal, “Please give your servants whatever you can find for them,” only insults were returned.

David was ready to end such insolence, and with 400 armed men, headed for Nabal’s home to kill him and all the males who lived there.

A shepherd ran to Abigail to report this. He said, “Nabal is such a wicked man that no one can talk to him. Please do what you can!”

Abigail quickly loaded donkeys with meat, bread, wine, grain, raisins, and pressed figs. Servants delivered them to David.



Going against her churlish husband’s wishes certainly would have brought down his wrath had she been caught. She risked her life by confronting angry warriors, intent on revenge.

David responded to her pleas for mercy, thanking her. He said, “Praise be to the LORD, the God of Israel, who has sent you today

to meet me. May you be blessed for your good judgment and for keeping me from bloodshed this day.”

As an unlikely hero, Abigail saved an unknown number of lives. The brave shepherd who informed her shared in the heroism. The next day, when she told Nabal of the drama, his heart failed him, and he died.

God specializes in choosing unlikely people for courageous deeds. A few examples among many include an orphan girl-turned queen who saved her nation ([Book of Esther](#)); a child who spoke hard truth to power ([1 Samuel 3](#)); a young slave girl who approached a princess ([Exodus 2:1-10](#)); and uneducated fishermen who brought the gospel to the world though they lost their lives over it. ([Matthew 4:18-22](#)).

Despite initial misgivings, these people had to decide what kind of person they wanted to be. One way to face our fears is to answer the same question.

Consider the life and mission of each of the following people. How do you think they answered the question, *What kind of person do I want to be?*

Will I risk everything? [Hee Jin’s Grandmother](#) in North Korea

Will I choose life? [Nick Vujicic](#)

Will I hold out? [Irena Sendler](#)

Will I let go? [Elisabeth Elliot](#)

Who do I want to face in the [mirror](#) tomorrow? [Dobri Dobrev](#)

How will I respond to my greatest regret? [Victoria Robinson](#)

Will my legacy point to life? [Jason Reid](#)

Will my example set a helpful precedent? [Marie Meggs](#)

Will I believe what I cannot yet see? [Jo Ann Robinson](#)

Will I keep my eyes on things of Heaven instead of on things of earth? [Jessie Tendayi](#)

Will I come back to God and ask for help when I fail miserably? [Jim Wahlberg](#)

## **The Difference-maker offers safety in his shelter**

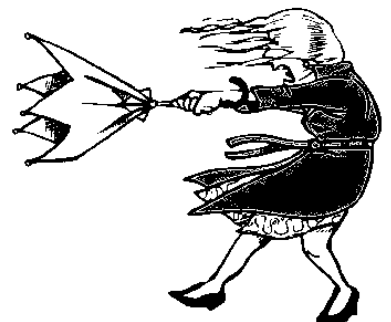
“We are having a physical experience in a spiritual world.”  
– Author unknown

Satan distorts and disrupts the truth in attempts to steer us from God. Human experience is a catalyst for such trickery because what we see and feel seems more real than an invisible God. Is he inconceivable, though?

His power is evidenced in nature.<sup>6</sup> His love has redeemed countless lives. Millions testify to his personal presence. We see God’s promises always come to pass whether spoken through prophets or other scriptures.<sup>7</sup> We witness his sovereignty throughout history.

Stout faith lets go of control and chooses to obey the proven God who shows himself real only to those with the spiritual eyes to see.<sup>8</sup> In his wisdom, he made it impossible for science or philosophy to prove his existence to closed minds.<sup>9</sup> Although faith is not blind, it is not sight, either.<sup>10</sup> Faith is the evidence of what we do not see.<sup>11</sup>

God’s shelter, unlike an umbrella or a tree, never fails.





Towers in fortified cities of biblical times provided safety when enemies attacked. In our spiritual battles, God's shelter is the hiding place.

The key is to stay there. [Psalm 91](#) says to live in his shelter - spend our time there. Then he hides us in his shadow as if we were in a tower of refuge.

This Psalm also tells us what we do not have to fear.

- 1. Satan's bait setting; plot; trap** (The fowler's snare)
- 2. Pandemic; disease** (Deadly pestilence)
- 3. Dread and the object of dread** (Terror of night)
- 4. Seemingly random attacks or dangers coming from all around; deeply personal attacks** (Arrows fly by day)
- 5. Disease, pandemic that walks about in trouble and in spiritual unreceptiveness** (Pestilence stalking in the dark)
- 6. Destruction coming from violence and devastation in the middle of the day or in the bright of happiness** (Plague that destroys at midday)
- 7. Wicked people** (Lion)
- 8. The Devil** (Serpent)



In distress of any kind, he rescues us or arms us for the battle. What is left to fear? If God is for us, who can be against us?<sup>12</sup>

We still want to hide from time to time. Aloneness is not intrinsically unhealthy. Jesus taught, "But when you pray...shut the door behind you..."<sup>13</sup>

It is the fear that locks us in that paralyzes the life we want. Remember, the Difference-maker sets us up with everything we need for faith, courage, and victory. In all circumstances we can declare as King Solomon did, "The name of the LORD is a fortified tower; the righteous run to it and are safe."<sup>14</sup>

### **The Difference-maker offers safety in his armor**

"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God..."<sup>15</sup>

Paul used a symbolic reference the people of his day would have understood, the armor of a Roman soldier. Comparing physical war to spiritual ones, he first describes why wearing God's armor is necessary.

One, our struggle is not against people, but against the devil and his spiritual forces of evil. Two, when we are harassed for our faith, we will resist, and stand.<sup>16</sup>

Wearing God's armor is a decision we make each day, in faith, bearing in mind the vital meaning of each piece.

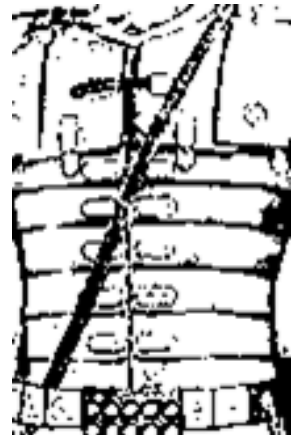


**The Belt of Truth** “Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist” The belt of a Roman soldier’s armor was more like a girdle and held up the breastplate.



What is truth? Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”<sup>17</sup> Absolute truth does not change and awareness of it protects us from lies that cause fear.

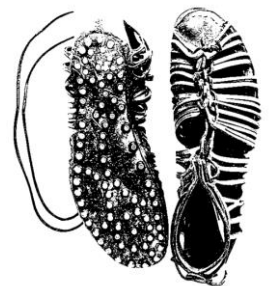
**The Breastplate of Righteousness** “...with the breastplate of righteousness in place” The Roman soldier’s breastplate held in place only once it was upheld by the belt.



What is righteousness? Thinking and acting in ways that honor God based on his instructions, these are righteousness. However, no human effort alone measures up to God’s holiness.

Truth upholds our righteousness as it grows in a life with Christ. His righteousness leads our way into God’s favor. There is no fear of punishment if our faith is sincerely in the Savior.<sup>18</sup>

**Feet Fitted with Readiness** “...and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.” Spikes covered the bottom of Roman soldiers’ footwear for climbing over rough terrain and for digging into the earth, keeping them steadfast in hand-to-hand combat.



What is the gospel of peace, and how does it make us ready? The gospel is the good news of Jesus the Messiah.<sup>19</sup> While we are alive, there is work to finish. Readiness to carry this gospel to others is part of our victory over fear <sup>20</sup>

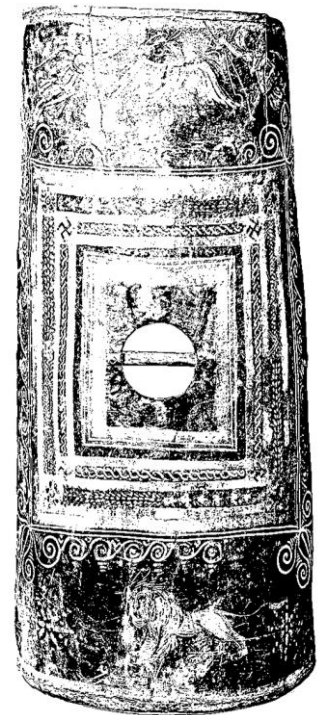
**Shield of Faith** “In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.” A Roman soldier carried a large, oblong, four-cornered shield, covering much of his body.

What is faith? It is more than believing in God. Even demons believe in God and shudder.<sup>21</sup> Faith is pure trust and confidence that God means what he says.<sup>22</sup>

Jesus said faith is like a tiny mustard seed which becomes the largest tree in the garden.<sup>23</sup> Pastors, teachers, the Holy Spirit, and personal study water and feed the seed. Nurturing our faith is our responsibility that in time, surpasses fear.

**Helmet of Salvation** “Take the helmet of salvation” Roman soldiers wore a unique helmet protecting the top and sides of their head. Some helmets also protected the back of the neck.

What is salvation? Not only is it rescue from a wasted life in the present and an erasure of eternal damnation, but the helmet is also the anticipation of the day we are ushered into



heaven.<sup>24</sup> Keeping our eyes on the reward, this helmet protects us from turning from the faith due to discouragement, doubt, and fear.

**Sword of the Spirit** “...and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” Roman soldiers possessed three sharp weapons, a dagger-sized short sword, a spear, and a long sword. Paul used the short sword for his comparison to the Word of God.



Why a small weapon? Satan tempted Jesus in a spectacular display of arrogance and deception. The battle of words was close-up, personal, and relentless. Each time the devil used his wiles, the Son of God expertly wielded his sword.<sup>25</sup>

In the heat of temptation aimed straight at our weakest points, skill at using God’s Word boosts our triumph over fear. <sup>26</sup>

**Prayer** “And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.” Roman soldiers needed supplies, stamina, and food and water.



What is prayer? Jesus gave an example<sup>27</sup> that goes something like this: “Our Father in heaven, let your name be treated with reverence. Let your kingdom come, let your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our bread for tomorrow and forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one; for yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen”

This prayer acknowledges God, makes various requests, yields to his will, and in faith believes all is possible because he is God.

God's armor is not intended as a shell to crawl inside. Neither is his shelter a place to isolate from the world.



Fear is fed by our focus. When the day comes that we learn to rest in God's shelter and wear his armor daily, we will stand with the brave who say, *It is scary out there, and the Difference-maker goes with me.*



## **Prayer to the Difference-maker**

*When I am hard pressed, I cry  
to you, Lord. You bring me into  
a spacious place. You, Lord, are  
with me; I will not be afraid.*

**Based on Psalm 118:5-6**

# Practical Exercise 10: Practice Grounding

Grounding calms strong emotions and impulsive thoughts or prevents them from rising. By grounding, we are, so to speak, bringing ourselves back down to earth.



Here are some techniques that can be helpful to avoid anxiety attacks or panic or to use during anxiety and panic attacks.

**1. Pay attention to your senses.** Stop, listen, and describe in detail all that you hear. Do the same for sights, smells, and tastes. What are you touching? You feel the floor under your feet? What else? Take as much time as possible until you feel more in charge of your emotions.



**2. Keep something of nature in your pocket.** Feel it when anxieties and other pressures rise, or before.

**3. An oldie but goodie; count.** Count until you are calm and reasonable. Count words in a book, tiles on a ceiling, or number of noises. Count your breaths, imaginary sheep (or real!) or simply count down from 500.



**4. Move your feet.** You can do this anywhere, anytime. Make walking movements with your feet and visualize walking right through the fear. I picture Jesus leading or carrying me.



**5. Focus on and pace your breaths and relax your muscles.** This can be done daily to lower stress levels. Practice this tool to prepare you for use during episodes of panic and anxiety.



**6. Do something with your hands.** If you are in a public place with little opportunity to walk away, practice sign language, or write the names of people you care about in the air discreetly below your waist. Fiddle with anything that requires your full attention like word searches.

**7. Sing praises to God or sing about him.** Sing reminders that he is in charge and has your back. Perhaps these lyrics will inspire you: God Will Make a Way

By a roadway in the wilderness,  
He'll lead me  
And rivers in the desert will I see  
Heaven and Earth will fade  
But His word will still remain  
And He will do something new today  
God will make a way  
Where there seems to be no way

He works in ways we cannot see  
He will make a way for me  
He will be my guide  
Hold me closely to His side  
With love and strength  
for each new day  
He will make a way,  
He will make a way

**8. Give yourself permission to worry later.** Keep a notebook and pen handy. The next time anxiety is triggered or could be, write the concern down and lay it aside. Set a date or time to address the issue, perhaps with a safe person.



## Next, Retrain your thoughts

When you feel anxious or tempted to fear, draw 5 columns and ask God to help you fill them out. Example below.

Current emotion	What event triggered your emotion?	What are your thoughts about said event?	What is another way of thinking about it?	Current emotion
Self-protective	I am starting a new project	The boss is going to blame me if the project is late even though Bob keeps stopping by my desk to chat; Bob should tell the boss it is his fault.	It is my project, and I am responsible for getting it done on time. I'll calmly tell Bob I do not have time to chat.	Calmer
Defensive	The family get-together is this weekend; I need to get a haircut before that gathering	The family will judge me; I do not know what to say	I have a choice whether to go to the family event. Cory and Jan are easy to talk to, I can spend time with them. I can get a haircut on Friday evening.	Relieved
Anxious	The deadline for filling out my tax forms is next week	Doing taxes is hard	I'll split the taxes over four nights starting Saturday.	Less frantic
Afraid	Dan wants me to call back	I cannot call everyone!	I'll text Dan to let him know I'll be free after the taxes are done next week.	In control
		I can't catch a break!		Looking forward to seeing Cory and Jan
				Glad to call Dan when I can focus
				Proud of myself

*Now may the God of peace,  
who through the blood of the  
eternal covenant brought back  
from the dead our Lord Jesus, that  
great Shepherd of the sheep, equip  
you with everything good for doing  
his will, and may he work in  
us what is pleasing to  
him, through Jesus Christ, to  
whom be glory for ever and ever.  
Amen.*

**Hebrews 13:20-21**

# ***APPENDIX***

<b>Terms</b>	<b>page 148</b>
<b>A Word About Medication</b>	<b>page 149</b>
<b>Bible References</b>	<b>page 152</b>
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# *Terms - Links*

[Bible/God's Word](#)

[Christ, Jesus Christ, Christ Jesus](#)

[Christian](#)

The Difference-maker= [God](#)

[Faith](#)

[Fear of God](#)

[Holy](#)

[Jesus](#)

[Original languages used to write the Bible](#)

[Types of mental health professionals](#)

[Repentance](#)

[Resurrection](#)

[Righteousness](#)

[Sin](#)

[Trinity](#)

# *A Word About Medication*

**A**n ongoing debate in faith arenas over the use of medications for mental health, particularly depression and anxiety, leaves confusion in its wake. Myths about this type of medical therapy abound.

**Myth 1. Medications cover up spiritual problems.** These drugs do not create happiness. They cannot force introspection, relief from guilt, or wisdom on a person any more than insulin prevents someone with diabetes from eating a candy bar.

If behaviors and circumstances that helped to create a mental health need do not change, the problem may persist. No pill will correct poor thinking, permanently erase memories of trauma, end abuse, or change a sinful heart.

Medications prepare a brain to function as intended. Once stable, the patient can choose to learn wisdom and pursue God, or not.

**Myth 2. Mental illness is a myth.** No. All mental illnesses are disorders. In other words, something is wrong with a person's ability to function normally due to mental processing. Medication is often necessary to save a life. Many chronicled symptoms give professionals an excellent idea of how to diagnose mental illness.

Everyone experiences down days, massive grief, and even

depressive thoughts. It becomes a disorder when a person cannot function normally, keep healthy relationships, or overcome these emotions.

**Myth 3. All that psychiatrists do is throw pills at you.** Psychiatrists are medical doctors, and specialists. It is their job to prescribe medication based on revealed symptoms. Appointments are typically about 15 minutes. Very few offer talk therapy (whereas psychologists generally do).

A psychiatrist may recommend hospitalization, or insist a client move to a higher level of care such as to an IOP (Intensive Outpatient Program). These are professional therapeutic programs that occur throughout the week in half or full days.

**Myth 4. Psychiatric medications do not work.** It is true, sometimes they do not. Six reasons for this have nothing to do with the medications themselves.

- A.** A patient does not take the medication as prescribed or is noncompliant and refuses it.
- B.** A patient refuses recommended co-treatments such as talk therapy.
- C.** The patient quits too soon. Unfortunately, it may take weeks and even months to discover the one that works best for a specific person. Dosages may also need readjustments.
- D.** The patient is unable to convey symptoms clearly. Prescriptions based on incomplete information will likely be less effective.
- E.** Affordability, lack of insurance parity, interference from family members, and more may disrupt proper treatment, creating any of the above issues.

F. Misdiagnosis by a doctor. This is especially a problem when non-psychiatric doctors prescribe psychiatric medications.

**Myth 5. Medications hurt people.** Safety may be compromised if medication is not taken as prescribed. The wrong medication too can adversely affect a person. Rumors about how often this occurs are exaggerated.

For most people, a combination of medication and talk therapy has proven most effective. For those who receive professional treatment, 80% go on to live more satisfying lives.

If medication corrects brain dysfunction and allows one to develop a richer life with Christ (and it has for me), then using medication is good stewardship of one's capabilities. Some takeaways from the mission statement of [Lighthouse Network](#) agree.

“Jesus is the only one with perfect brain chemistry and no psychological issues. Every other human has some psychological dysfunction...Psychological Science is simply understanding how God designed our mind to work and then learning how to maximally steward our mind for His glory and our fulfillment in Him.”

For a deeper look at therapy and medications from a Christian point of view, go to [\*Is It Ok for a Christian to Take Anti-depressants?\*](#)



# Bible References

## Chapter

### 1 The Difference-Maker

<sup>1</sup>Exodus 14:14

<sup>4</sup>James 1:17

<sup>7</sup>Romans 6:23

<sup>10</sup>Romans 8:10-18

<sup>2</sup>Matthew 11:28-29

<sup>5</sup>1 John 1:5

<sup>8</sup>2 Thessalonians 1:7-10

<sup>11</sup>Psalm 29:11

<sup>3</sup>Romans 12:2

<sup>6</sup>John 8:7

<sup>9</sup>Ephesians 2:4-9 NIV

<sup>12</sup>Ephesians 3: 14-19

### 2 Self-doubt

<sup>1</sup>Proverbs 4:6 -7

<sup>3</sup>1 Kings 3:9

<sup>6</sup>2 Timothy 3:16

<sup>9</sup>Mark 12:24

<sup>12</sup>2 Corinthians 3:17-18

<sup>15</sup>Psalm 46:10

<sup>1.5</sup>2 Samuel 11:1-12:25

<sup>4</sup>Hebrews 5:11-14niv

<sup>7</sup>2 Peter 1:20-21

<sup>10</sup>1 Corinthians 14:33nkjv

<sup>13</sup>Matthew 6:33

<sup>16</sup>Deuteronomy 32:3-4

<sup>2</sup>Psalm 139 23-24

<sup>5</sup>Psalm 32:8niv

<sup>8</sup>2 Timothy 3:16-17niv

<sup>11</sup>Hebrews 11:6

<sup>14</sup>James 1:5-7

<sup>17</sup>Exodus 3:14

### 3 Toxic Shame

<sup>1</sup>Luke 23:42-44

<sup>4</sup>Ephesians 3:17-19

<sup>7</sup>Psalm 103:14

<sup>10</sup>Luke 23:34

<sup>12</sup>Acts 8:3

<sup>15</sup>Psalm 34:5

<sup>2</sup>Psalms 3:4

<sup>5</sup>Psalm 103:11-12

<sup>8</sup>Proverbs 3:7-8

<sup>11</sup>Acts 7:59-60

<sup>13</sup>Acts 20:22-24

<sup>16</sup>2 Corinthians 13:14

<sup>3</sup>Micah 7:18-19

<sup>6</sup>Psalm 44:21

<sup>9</sup>Matthew 5:23-24

<sup>11.5</sup>Acts 8:1

<sup>14</sup>Philippians 3:5-14

### 4 Self-loathing

<sup>1</sup>Genesis 1:27

<sup>4</sup>James 3:9-11

<sup>7</sup>2 Corinthians 5:17

<sup>10</sup>James 2:23

<sup>13</sup>John 10: 27-30

<sup>2</sup>Psalm 8:4-6

<sup>5</sup>Ephesians 2:10

<sup>8</sup>Lamentations 3:22-23

<sup>11</sup>John 15:15

<sup>14</sup>2 Corinthians 12:8-10

<sup>3</sup>Isaiah 55:8

<sup>6</sup>Psalm 139:13

<sup>9</sup>1 John 3:1

<sup>12</sup>Psalm 27:10

# Chapter

## 5 Extreme Conclusions

<sup>1</sup>[Matthew 7:1](#)

<sup>4</sup>[Matthew 5:47niv](#)

<sup>7</sup>[Luke 10:30-37](#)

<sup>9</sup> [1 Corinthians 13:12](#)

<sup>11</sup>[Matthew 19:16-26](#)

<sup>14</sup>[John 11](#)

<sup>15</sup> **Verses 4, 23** Throughout his ministry, people had trouble giving up old beliefs and fully grasping what Jesus was saying. In John 11, we see him telling his disciples that Lazarus' illness will not result in death, that this situation will bring glory to God (like the healing of the man born blind which they witnessed [John 9](#)). He informs Martha that Lazarus will be raised by him. (In the original language, the word used when he says "Lazarus will live" means raised from a lying down position- raised from the dead).

<sup>16</sup> **Verses 33,28** Some traditional versions say Jesus was deeply moved, or troubled. Jesus was agitated, or angry, wanting to instruct everyone and perhaps restrain the faithless talk around him. He waited, and instead allowed his prayer and the results to speak for themselves.

<sup>17</sup>[Psalms 119:96](#)

<sup>20</sup> [Mark 14: 66-72](#)

<sup>23</sup>[Acts 4:13](#)

<sup>2</sup>[Matthew 25:37-40](#)

<sup>5</sup>[Matthew 5:43-44](#)

<sup>8</sup>[Numbers 19:11-16niv and Leviticus 21:1-4, 10-12niv](#)

<sup>10</sup>[Matthew 7:3-5](#)

<sup>12</sup>[Matthew 6:24](#)

<sup>3</sup>[Luke 3:11](#)

<sup>6</sup>[Matthew 7:12](#)

<sup>10.5</sup>[Luke 11:35-36](#)

<sup>13</sup>[Isaiah 7:14](#)

<sup>18</sup>[1 Samuel 16:7](#)

<sup>21</sup>[John 20:1-10](#)

<sup>24</sup>[2 Corinthians 4:7](#)

<sup>19</sup> [Mark 14:27-31](#)

<sup>22</sup> [John 21:1-19](#)

<sup>25</sup>[James 1:16-18](#)

## 6 Hopelessness

<sup>1</sup>[Isaiah 43:18-19 niv](#)

<sup>4</sup>[Genesis 16:11-13](#)

<sup>6</sup>[Psalms 119:140](#)

<sup>9</sup>[Ruth 1:1-22 and 4:13-17](#)

<sup>12</sup>[2 Kings 18,19](#)

<sup>15</sup>[Matthew 10:29](#)

<sup>18</sup> [Book of Job](#)

<sup>2</sup>[Psalms 34:18](#)

<sup>4.5</sup> [Job 39:5-8](#)

<sup>7</sup>[Psalms 136:1-3](#)

<sup>10</sup>[Psalms 31:21-23](#)

<sup>13</sup>[1 Kings 18,19](#)

<sup>16</sup>[Proverbs 14:10](#)

<sup>19</sup>[Job 42:7-9](#)

<sup>3</sup>[Psalms 121:3](#)

<sup>5</sup>[Nehemiah 9:19-20](#)

<sup>8</sup>[Psalms 143:7-8](#)

<sup>11</sup>[2 Corinthians 7:5-7](#)

<sup>14</sup>[Psalms 139:1-12](#)

<sup>17</sup>[Proverbs 13:20](#)

<sup>20</sup>[Psalms 119:130](#)

## 7. Jealousy and Envy

<sup>1</sup>[Exodus 34:10,14](#)

<sup>4</sup>[Philippians 2:3-11](#)

<sup>7</sup>[1 Corinthians 13:4-8niv](#)

<sup>10</sup>[1 John 2:15-16](#)

<sup>2</sup>[James 3:16](#)

<sup>5</sup>[Matthew 21:28-32](#)

<sup>8</sup>[Romans 12:15](#)

<sup>11</sup>[Titus 3:3-5](#)

<sup>3</sup>[Proverbs 14:30](#)

<sup>6</sup>[Philippians 2:12-14](#)

<sup>9</sup>[Jeremiah 9:23-25](#)

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## 8. Destructive Blame

- |   |                           |                            |
|---|---------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1 <u>Proverbs 14:9-10</u>                                     | 21 <u>John 1:8</u>        | 3 <u>Isaiah 59: 1, 2</u>   |
| 4 <u>Proverbs 19:3</u>  | 5 <u>James 1:13</u>       | 6 <u>James 1:14-15</u>     |
| 7 <u>Hebrews 12:10</u>  | 8 <u>Proverbs 3:11-12</u> | 9 <u>Proverbs 17:21</u>    |
| 10 <u>Proverbs 22:10</u>                                      | 11 <u>Exodus 20:1-17</u>  | 12 <u>Mark 12:28-31</u>    |
| 13 <u>Romans 13:9-10niv</u>                                   | 14 <u>Matthew 5:3-10</u>  | 15 <u>Psalm 41:1</u>       |
| 16 <u>Matthew 11:6 ESV</u>                                    | 17 <u>Psalm 32:1-2</u>    | 18 <u>Psalm 146:5</u>      |
| 19 <u>John 15:1-5</u>   | 20 <u>Romans 8:1</u>      | 21 <u>2 Peter 1:3-9</u>    |
| 22 <u>Proverbs 11:30</u>                                      |                           |                            |
| 23 <u>Ephesians 5:1-20; Galatians 5:22-23; Proverbs 10:31</u> |                           |                            |
| 24 <u>1 Corinthians 9:24-25</u>                               | 25 <u>James 1:12</u>      | 26 <u>Philippians 3:14</u> |

## 9. Perceived Dependency

- |                                  |                             |                         |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1 <u>Isaiah 44:20</u>            | 1.5 <u>Matthew 19:21nlt</u> | 2 <u>John 7:17</u>      |
| 3 <u>John 8:24</u>               | 4 <u>John 8:31-32</u>       | 5 <u>Matthew 23:37</u>  |
| 5.5 <u>1 Corinthians 1:20</u>    | 6 <u>Genesis 8:1</u>        | 7 <u>Genesis 31:42</u>  |
| 8 <u>Genesis 50:20</u>           | 9 <u>1 Samuel 23:14</u>     | 10 <u>Acts 26:22</u>    |
| 11 <u>Philippians 2:27</u>       | 12 <u>Acts 2:24niv</u>      | 13 <u>Romans 5:8niv</u> |
| 14 <u>2 Corinthians 7:5-7niv</u> | 15 <u>Jeremiah 4:1</u>      | 16 <u>Mark 2:17</u>     |
| 17 <u>Psalm 73:25-26niv</u>      |                             |                         |

## 10. Fear

- |                                 |                                 |                             |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1 <u>Hebrews 12:2</u>           | 2 <u>Hebrews 12:3</u>           | 3 <u>Matthew 28:1-10</u>    |
| 4 <u>Matthew 28:20</u>          | 5 <u>1 Samuel 25:1-38</u>       | 6 <u>Romans 1:20</u>        |
| 7 <u>1 Kings 8:56-57</u>        | 8 <u>1 Corinthians 2:10-16</u>  | 9 <u>1 Corinthians 1:21</u> |
| 10 <u>2 Corinthians 5:7</u>     | 11 <u>Hebrews 11:1</u>          | 12 <u>Romans 8:31</u>       |
| 13 <u>Matthew 6:6</u>           | 14 <u>Proverbs 18:10</u>        | 15 <u>Ephesians 6:10,11</u> |
| 16 <u>Ephesians 6:11-13</u>     | 17 <u>John 8:31-32</u>          | 18 <u>Romans 8:1-16</u>     |
| 19 <u>Ephesians 5:1</u>         | 20 <u>2 Corinthians 5:18-19</u> | 21 <u>James 2:19</u>        |
| 22 <u>Romans 10:17</u>          | 23 <u>Matthew 13:31-32</u>      |                             |
| 24 <u>1 Thessalonians 5:8-9</u> | 25 <u>Matthew 4:1-11</u>        | 26 <u>Hebrews 5:12-14</u>   |
| 27 <u>Matthew 6:9-13</u>        |                                 |                             |

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# *Index to Chapter Exercises Plus Bonus Exercises*

## **1: Make the Thought Exchange - Page 12**

### **BONUS EXERCISE: Exchange News and Social Media for Books and Face-to-face Conversation**

A sense of aloneness and anxiety might come from a lack of eye-to-eye contact and conversation and an overload of news reports.

Turn off all the negativity and pick up a good book. During the day, make plans with a friend to visit over coffee.

Do this for two weeks and you will feel the results.

## **2: Use Pros and Cons for Good Judgment - Page 25**

### **Remember Who Has All the Answers - Page 26**



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## **BONUS EXERCISE: Sleep Hygiene**

- Keep a sleep routine.
  - Avoid late heavy meals.
  - No screens in use in the bedroom (T.V., phone, computer...)
  - Turn screens off 30 minutes before sleep.
  - De-stress before bedtime; avoid arguing and tasks for 30 minutes.
- 

### **3: Examine the Evidence for Shame – Page 37**

### **Secure Your Release From Toxic Shame – Page 38**

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## **BONUS EXERCISE: Incorporate Self-care**

Do something nice for yourself. How about a healthy breakfast? Want to go for a walk or a drive on your lunch hour? Spend time laughing, practice breathing exercises, or take a bubble bath. Self-care is nurturing yourself in a way that helps you feel relaxed and more peaceful. Plan 20 minutes each day for self-care.

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### **4: Word-Swap – Page 47**

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## **BONUS EXERCISE: Write Your Biography**

Write stories from your life using only positive descriptive words about yourself. It doesn't have to seem true at first. Keep at it.

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## Test Messages and Messengers – Page 48

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### **BONUS EXERCISE: Mirror, Mirror**

Look yourself in the eye and say, “I am loved, I am lovable.”  
Repeat.

---

### **5: Train of Thought - Page 67**

#### **Brainstorm More Options – Page 67**

### **Know When to Say Yes for a Most-fulfilling Life – Page 68**

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### **BONUS EXERCISE: Have a Routine**

Sometimes when emotions run our decision-making, we need something stable to help us stay on track with what it is we want.

On your calendar, mark your day’s routine. Set alarms on your phone for meals, meds, and free time.

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### **6: When You Feel Hopeless, Live a Little – Page 89**

#### **Lower Your Stress – Page 90**

## **Allow Hope - Page 90**

### **Steps to finding professional help - Page 91**

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#### **BONUS EXERCISE: Prevention**

Lack of motivation and finding no pleasure in pleasurable activities are two of the classic symptoms that doctors look for to diagnose depression. One action serves a preventative role.

Make a 9” x 9” paper circle. List around the circle activities you enjoy and those you want to try, Ring a paper clip over a pencil and plant the pencil in the middle of your circle. Spin the paper clip. The activity it points to is what you do for this day. Another circle with names can select whom to invite to join in the activity.

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#### **7: Act Opposite - Page 100**

#### **Do the Amazing – Page 101**

#### **Change the Script – Page 101**

#### **8: Find Harmony- Page 115**

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## **BONUS EXERCISE: Count the Blessings**

On a calendar, each day, write down something good that has come from painful experiences. For example, “I have new, safer friends.”

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**Draw a Circle Around Yourself - Page 116**

**9: Now What? – Page 128**

**Spell It Out – Page 128**

**Read Romans – Page 128**

**Find a Strong Support System – Pages 130-131**

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## **BONUS EXERCISE: Curb the Mental Obsession -**

Find a non-stressful activity that demands your focus.

Crosswords

Learn a new song

Tie fishing lures

Fantasy Football

Memorize scripture

Word search

Research

Learn a new skill

Write poetry

Paint

Knit a new pattern

Math

Pray through a list of prayer requests from others

Your idea...

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## 10: Practice Grounding – Page 143-144

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### **BONUS EXERCISE**

For ideas about purposeful activities and meaningful relationships during pandemic isolation, see my free e-book: [Stay at Home and Thrive](#).

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## Retrain Your Thoughts – Page 145

# *Notes*







