

Anxiety as an Opportunity:

practices for experiencing God
when you feel anxious

Contributors:

Jill Reasa, Nic Gibson, Mike Beresford, and Jackson Pennings

Isaiah 26:3

You will keep in perfect peace
those whose minds are steadfast,
because they trust in you.



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Preface

This packet is intended to be a resource for people working through anxiety – with the understanding that, to some extent, that includes all of us. Because this packet is intended to be a practical resource, it contains what we hope is just enough spiritual and psychological background information to inform an understanding of the process of working through anxiety. It is not intended to be an exhaustive explanation of how our emotions function, how to be relationally healthy, or how our psychology and spirituality interact, though it will discuss each of those ideas. It is not a resource for diagnosing or assessing clinical anxiety. At its root, all anxiety is spiritual—as well as physiological, emotional, relational—because we are whole human beings.

These concepts are rooted in lived, embodied experience, and have to do with the spiritual and relational dynamics of anxiety; therefore, we expect that many of the ideas explained here will feel abstract and maybe even of questionable relevance until the moment arrives when you will need to apply them in real time, in real life. It is okay if, for now, things don't seem to make complete sense. The processing of your real-life experience with God and others will help to complete your understanding of how God has made *you personally* (and humans in general) to function, *and what that experience is really like*. So, in order to understand fully, we will have to commit ourselves to practicing and processing these ideas in real life, and in deeply honest community. Non-anxious presence with God and others is a *practice*, a way of living, not an intellectual attainment. If you do want to read more about the topic of anxiety and related topics, we encourage you to explore our list of referenced works at the end of the packet (though it is not exhaustive). Our hope is that this packet would offer a framework for processing your anxiety with God and others, and that it would inspire continued critical thinking about how we interact with anxiety as Christians and as the Church.



Foundational Framework

A Theory of Emotions

Emotions are revelatory. This means we must learn to identify our emotions and embrace the realities they uncover. Emotions are tuned to our perceptions of reality, which are shaped by our past experiences and relationships, the flesh, and hopefully in increasing measure, our godliness. Our emotions can be re-tuned to the realities of the Gospel, the kingdom of God, the Spirit of the Living Christ within us, and the promises of his Scriptures so that anxiety (along with other emotions) can ultimately be helpful for growing in godliness and pursuing peace in a chaotic world.

Anxiety points to something. The thing that anxiety points to must be faced, whether it is a deeper uncomfortable emotion, a situation that involves brokenness, an area where our beliefs don't resemble the reality that God has described to us through the Scriptures, or something else. Often, parts of what our anxiety reveals we need to receive, and parts we need to resist. For example, we may need to accept the reality that underneath our anxiety lies another uncomfortable emotion, like hopelessness. We do not need to accept that our situation actually is hopeless, or that we must do whatever that emotion drives us to do.

Ultimately, our goal isn't to disassemble our anxiety so that we understand how it works (and distance ourselves from our emotions in the process). There is a kind of psychologized self-help that seeks to tweak and perfect the human being completely apart from the power of God, and that process envisions negative emotional experiences as a weakness or harm. Instead, our goal is to feel our feelings, which is part of effectively processing the meaning of our emotions, and a deeply important part of what it means to be human. Eventually, there is a time when the analysis must end, or at least pause, and the feelings themselves just need to be felt.

A Vision for Resilience and Godliness



Our goal is to effectively work through anxiety. But the bigger question is: who are we trying to become? Surely, we would all like to feel less anxious. But this change can't come through our circumstances that led us to feel anxious. Our more holistic goal must be that we would become a stronger kind of being, equipped and ready to interact with the anxiety in us and around us.

Psychologists would say we are seeking to become a “non-anxious presence.” Similarly, as Christians, we are called to godliness, or to be like God. However, we don't do this work by doing. We become godly by being in God, and through God being in us. Through the power of God in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Spirit of God works in us to do that same work of resurrection in our hearts, transforming us to become more like Jesus and more like who he created us to be. Godliness isn't doing the right thing, or even following the right steps to get to a certain outcome (like resolving anxiety). It is being who we were created and called to be. This doesn't mean that we won't ever experience anxiety. But it does mean that we will interact with our anxiety and the anxieties of others in a way that is tuned to the realities of the gospel, the Scriptures, and the Spirit of God working through us. And it means that anxiety becomes an opportunity.

In our response to anxiety, we are seeking to grow in godliness through:

1. Security, practiced through rest.
 - a. Rest is an antithesis to chronic anxiety. “Hopeful people are rested people.” (Timberlake, September 13, 2023).
 - b. Intentionally ceasing from our anxious striving and choosing to rest demonstrates our trust in God to provide what we need (2 Peter 1:3-11), in people to work interdependently with us to build formational communities, and in our identity, dignity, and worth that does not need to be proven.
2. Integrity, practiced through courage.



- a. Do the right thing and be one person in the face of shifting circumstances, pressures of the world, fear of man, being misunderstood (like Jesus).
 - b. Integrity comes by practicing godliness with our whole being, not spirit apart from body (which is dualism¹).
3. Humility, practiced through self-forgetfulness (Keller, 2012).
- a. Humility is a self-forgetfulness that holds in tension that we are not immune to experiencing anxiety—we can expect it—but also, we must seek freedom from it and victory over it—we cannot succumb to it.
 - b. Anxiety is slippery because it victimizes us—both in making us feel like we’re victims to our circumstances, and we further become victims to our circumstances—all the while making us more self-absorbed and self-protective. Therefore, it has the potential to be wholly and insidiously destructive to real humility.

If we are going to grow in our resilience and godliness through anxiety, this requires that we take ownership of and face our feelings of anxiety, the realities that it reveals, our harmful reactions to anxiety, and the productive response we need to enact.

Anxiety is a physiological, emotional experience that often occurs when we feel out of control in some way. Taking ownership cuts to the heart of anxiety, because when we take ownership, we choose to take rightful self-control over what is ours to steward and cultivate.

¹ “Dualism” here means the bad kind of dualism—that the body and Spirit are separable and unintegrated. Christians believe in a spiritual or immaterial kind of being (spirit/soul) that enables our disembodied existence by means of God’s power (after death and before resurrection called the “intermediate state”). But “dualism” here means that we can TREAT the body and soul as though they are not integrally, completely and compositely interwoven, so that what happens in one is not happening in the other. This kind of dualism is a heresy that was taught by sects like the Gnostics and other groups that downplayed the importance of the body. Scripture starts with the good of physical creation and natural processes and ends with resurrected bodies in a real garden city in a recreated creation. Being spiritual bodies is our creation and our destiny.



Ownership leads to transformation. We gain traction in our emotional experiences when we use them to identify what an event meant to us. What does the emotion uncover about our identity and about reality? Conversely, ruminating (“over-digesting” the details of an event like we are chewing on cud) or narrating the details of a situation isn’t usually helpful or necessary for resolving our emotions or addressing the underlying problems, and instead, it usually increases our anxiety. Transformation and resolving emotions happen when we identify not only what happened but: 1.) how we feel about what happened and 2.) what it means to us.

Goal:

Recognize anxiety as an opportunity to face and grow in godliness and resilience.

Practice:

We have everything we need for life and godliness through the promises of God (2 Peter 1:3 -11) for facing anxiety in Christ centered faith. Where is anxiety operating most in your life, and how is this a spiritual opportunity?

Reflect:

- What repetitive actions do you do that you would not choose?
- When do you feel anxious—or “feel stress”? What does that feel like in your body? What does it relate to in your circumstances?
- When do you behave in a way that you regret later—in a way that feels almost out of control?

What do your responses to the above questions reveal about what makes you feel anxious?



Grounding in Security & Identity

for moments of intense anxiety

Moments of strong physiological and emotional experiences inhibit cognitive reasoning. In the moment when you notice yourself feeling anxious, you don't need to dissect it. Instead, it is time to let yourself pause. This isn't ungodly; this is how we were created as emotional beings. This is part of experiencing emotions according to their created intention. Pausing to calm physical reactions to stress and redirect the anxious thoughts will equip you to respond rather than react to anxiety.

Physical Grounding Practices

Goal:

Engage your whole body in responding to anxiety in a secure way, rather than according to what the anxiety compels you to do out of insecurity. Anxiety is a whole-body response, and is felt physiologically, and so we must engage with it at that level before productive spiritual processing can occur.

Practice:

Make an "anxiety exit plan" for responding to anxiety. These are things that might be particular to you, but they have common principles behind them. They are intentional activities that physically ground your body, calm your reaction, and empower you to embrace the reality of what you can and cannot control.

For example, I (Jill) have two notecards in my office for moments of anxiety that pop up at work. One has a list of truths I want to remember to ground myself in reality and my identity. These are truths I can easily forget in the moment that I am tossed by the waves of anxiety:

- Live transparently



- “Dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness” (Psalm 37:3 ESV)
- “Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart” (Psalm 37:4 ESV)
- Be bold and humble
- Speak truth to injustice
- Live reconciled in love
- “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5:44)
- Keep the communication lines clear
- “Do not grow weary in doing good” (Galatians 6:9 NIV)

These can be any Scriptures or principles you need to remember in a moment of weakness or struggle. These often come to us in times of strength; make your plan from a place of security, considering who you are and who you want to be, so that you have an anchor to hold onto when the waves get rough.

My second list includes intentional activities to remind me that life is beautiful, God is good, and that I can also experience joy:

- Worship with guitar and singing
- Walk outside for 10 minutes
- Rollerblade for 10 minutes (yes, I do keep rollerblades in my office)
- Read a book or Scripture
- Text a friend
- Write an encouraging card
- Journal

As you can see from my list, the activities will vary depending on your life stage, history, interests, and particular triggers for anxiety. After all, the goal is to remind you of your reality and identity. Below are some more ideas to help you create your action plan.



Spiritual activities:

Praying on your own can be difficult and unproductive in a moment of intense anxiety because we engage with prayer on a thought level, which is the very capacity that is incapacitated by anxiety. These are helpful spiritual practices to engage with anxiety at an emotional and physical level:

- Sabbath: cease and rest intentionally (as in, scheduled) from the activities that may be good, but that in excess lead you to seek to prove your worth through productivity, praise, tangible results, etc.
- Read Scripture out loud or memorize Scripture to recite to yourself.
- Call a friend to pray for you: You don't need to explain the circumstances, The goal is to get at the spiritual root and outcomes – not necessarily a certain outcome of a circumstance to all work out the way we imagine. This is often more productive in a moment of anxiety or in a group experiencing anxiety than praying silently for oneself.
- Worship: sing, play an instrument, play worship music and sing along while doing the dishes or in the car. The rhythm of the music and the truth of the lyrics are good antidotes to anxiety.

Social activities:

If you experience social anxiety, social antidotes to anxiety may differ depending on your reaction to social anxiety. In general, the goal is that you are trying to respond with your whole being as if you were socially secure.

- If you automatically withdraw from others in moments of anxiety, it can be helpful to engage with others in a loving way. By doing so, you are choosing to engage in an activity that you have an ability to control. The action doesn't have to be specifically connected to your anxiety.
 - Write a note of affirmation or gratitude to another person



- Do a specific, tangible, loving act for another person, like bring them a meal, pick up their kids from school, etc.
- If you automatically people-please in moments of anxiety, it can be helpful to do the opposite of the above; take a pause to remember your identity and security before re-engaging or committing.
 - Turn off your phone for a few hours each day or as your response to anxiety.
 - Keep a journal of moments of connection with others, or where people told you they loved you or affirmed you. In the moment you are anxious that people don't like you or that they are leaving you, etc., you can look back at this journal to remember the reality in your relationships.
 - Keep a journal to remember the presence of the Lord with you and his faithfulness and provision to you. This will cultivate contentment and peace for moments when people disappoint you.
 - For moments when another person asks you to do something for them that you may feel resentful toward in the future, memorize a phrase like, "That sounds fun! Let me look at my calendar and get back to you soon!". Then you can pause and reflect on your anxiety and what it reveals about your intentions and motivations.

Physical activities:

Anxiety is felt physiologically through restlessness, racing heart, racing thoughts, sweating, nausea or upset stomach, and more. The goal with physical activities is to use your body as though you were feeling secure, to try and remind your body that you are okay. If you search Google for physical grounding activities for anxiety, you will find plenty. Here are a few ideas²:

- Nourishment: this is different than dieting. The goal here is not to eat healthy in order to lose weight, but to eat well to nourish your body. Your brain is an

² See Appendix A for more ideas from The Common Rule, or visit thecommonrule.org.



organ, created by God. Just as your heart needs specific physical nourishment and care to prevent issues, so does your brain. Nourishment won't eradicate all mental health conditions, but it will help.

- Important vitamins and supplements for anxiety and mental health:
GABA, Omega-3, Vitamin D, Magnesium
- Focus on eating whole foods and consistent meals
- Limit sugar and caffeine
- Take deep belly breaths with a long inhale and even longer exhale (i.e. 4 seconds inhale, 8 seconds exhale).
- Get a full night's sleep. You will feel better in the morning.
- Weight resistance: Putting pressure on the body can help relieve anxiety. Some ideas:
 - Weighted blanket
 - Wall push ups
 - Resistance bands
 - Lifting weights
 - Manual or outdoor labor activities
- Walk: Walking is a calm, physical activity that activates both sides of the brain by using both sides of the body, which helps ground your mind in the present moment.
- Cardio exercise: Cardio exercise, especially running, activates serotonin production and releases endorphins. This will help you feel more clarity and calm.
- Clean or organize your space: Cleaning and organizing are tangible activities that engage your body and provide immediate gratification toward creating order out of chaos. They are also good activities to do with your hands while thinking through what's on your mind or talking through a problem with someone else.



- Play or sing music: These are activities of joy and rhythm, two things that feel far away in a moment of anxiety and chaos.
- Do an activity you enjoy, like a hobby. This will help you remember who you are, and that your identity is bigger than the feelings of anxiety.
 - Dance
 - Fishing
 - Boxing (or punching another inanimate object)
 - Rollerblading
 - Cooking or baking
 - Art
 - Biking
 - Hiking
- Physical touch (non-sexual):
 - Place your hand on your chest, like you are saying the pledge of allegiance. “Skin to skin” contact calms down the nervous system.
 - Hug a friend or another person you trust
- Go outside: step outside from wherever you are for 10 minutes to be quiet, pause, and let your thoughts settle. It can help to simply change your environment.

Activities to avoid when feeling anxious:

If the goal in a moment of anxiety is to intentionally engage our whole bodies out of security, we need to fight the compulsion to escape difficult feelings by withdrawing and numbing through unproductive subconscious or unconscious activities.

- Ruminating on the experience out loud or in your mind:
 - This can include narrating the details of the circumstances of what happened to you without identifying how you feel, what it means to you, what you can and cannot control, and how you need to move forward.



Sharing vulnerably for vulnerability's sake will feel relieving in the moment, but it will not lead to gaining traction. Often, we end up projecting or justifying. Taking ownership leads to transformation.

- Consuming avoidant substances: these do not help you engage the situation leading to your anxiety with agency, stewardship, or even rest:
 - TV
 - Social Media
 - Video games
 - Alcohol or other drugs
- Naps: These can sometimes be helpful, but they can also inhibit a full night's sleep, which is more helpful to feeling less anxious. Naps can lead you to feeling more disengaged, behind, and out of control when you wake up—because you were literally unconscious.
- Codependent behaviors that seek false reassurance of security and identity:
 - Making someone else feel okay so that we feel okay may lead us to feel relieved in the moment, but it provides false security and trust. These compulsions and behaviors are often formed out of wounds (which we'll get at more in the Community section of the packet).
 - We cannot take ownership of someone else's feelings, actions, thoughts, or decisions. This is seeking to control what we cannot control, which is a source of anxiety itself.
 - Examples or markers of codependent behaviors:
 - lack of boundaries which results in resentment
 - possessiveness over another person
 - managing someone else's emotional response
 - providing needs for someone else when you aren't stewarding similar needs in your own life
- Working harder: Resting and working must be held in tension while seeking to steward what we can control in response to anxiety.



- If you have a compulsion to keep working because it never feels like you've done enough, try something else. God calls us to cease and rest from the god of productivity which leads us only to be enslaved by the world (Mammon). This idol is never satisfied. It will never feel like you've done enough to provide for yourself.
- Take a pause to evaluate and be conscious of your reality and what you can control and can't control.
- This isn't the reason to stop and rest, but you will likely get more creative and effective work done once you're rested, unrushed, and operating from a secure identity.
- For further study, see Exodus 16 and Matthew 6:19-34.



Identifying and Processing Anxiety

anxiety as an opportunity

The physical grounding practices above help us to relieve the intensity of anxiety and get us to a point where we can identify and process the anxiety we experience, so that we know when to expect it and how to effectively experience it in the future.

Goal:

Recognize the feeling of anxiety and when it occurs, so that we can get at the root of what it means, respond out of security, integrity and humility, and grow in godliness and resilience.

Practice:

- Block off some time (or use part of your devotional time with God), to assess and journal moments of anxiety with the instructions below.
- Look at the 30 Universal Sources of Anxiety (Appendix B) or think of a recent time when you felt anxious, frustrated, or stressed.
- Process the event using the following steps and prompts. These prompts are meant to evoke intuitional and immediate responses. Your immediate response might feel childish - that's often the case because root issues formed in childhood, were "confirmed" over time, and have stuck with us. The anxiety we experience in the present moment is just a branch on that tree.
 - Identify the triggered state: How are you reacting to the situation in your mind, body, and relationships? For example:
 - Do you feel pain or tension in your body?
 - Do you withdraw from others, or compulsively seek affirmation?
 - Are you avoiding a particular situation?
 - Identify the feelings: What feelings are underneath your reaction? Get specific about the "flavor" of the feeling of anxiety (see Feelings Wheel,



Appendix C). Are you anxious, or are you angry, embarrassed, jealous, or something else? (We will also talk more about this in the next section of the packet.)

- Identify the external triggers: What things or types of things outside of you activate this response? For example:
 - What happened to trigger the anxiety? Was there a specific action, tone, interaction?
 - Are you giving into a felt need?
 - Does it remind you of anything in the past, or other similar situations? What about it feels familiar?
- Identify the internal root: Get curious about the feeling of anxiety. It is a signpost! What thing inside of you is activated by that trigger, whether natural human needs, developmental experiences, traumatic events, or otherwise? (You can also use the practices in the Facing Anxieties in Communities section to get at this root in a deeper way.) For example:
 - Why is it there? What is underneath it?
 - What do you feel you need (that you don't really need) to be okay in that moment?
 - What are you afraid is going to happen?
 - What are you afraid is true or being confirmed about yourself through this situation (i.e. I am stupid; I am the problem; they are going to leave me; I am alone; I can't do it; etc.)?
 - What are you trying to protect, and why?
 - What are you afraid is true about God or others?
 - What is the immaturity that you don't want to address and/or grow in?
- Identify and choose a response: How can I take ownership of my feelings, motivations, and actions? For example:
 - What is the next good thing that is within your power to do in the situation?



- How do the Scriptures address the underlying root you discovered?
- What does it look like to embody the truth in love, and to live by the Spirit instead of the flesh?
- How could you respond instead of reacting when you experience a similar future trigger?
- What am I trying to control that I need to let go of, or trust God for?



Differentiating Primary Emotions

What is anxiety masking?

Emotions are revelatory: they are valid signals of reality, created by God, so that we can navigate and express the truths of his kingdom in the world. But emotions are not reality itself, because they are tuned to our reality—whether to our flesh and self-absorption, or to our godliness and the presence of the Spirit in us. If our reality is formed by God and his ways, our emotions (even strong, negative ones) will not necessarily be less in frequency or intensity; instead, they will be purer, and better able to point us to issues and effectively resolve them.

For example, anger stems from a sense of injustice. But one's sense of injustice can be skewed based on selfishness. Conversely, the anger of God and of his Son, Jesus is displayed throughout Scripture when there is impurity in his temple; this is the ultimate injustice that breeds further harm. For example, in Ezekiel 8 and John 2, God isn't throwing a temper tantrum with his anger; he is driving out evil.

Our culture often broadly identifies negative emotional experiences as “anxiety”, though they may be rooted in valid, distinct emotions such as anger, hurt, grief, fear, shame, jealousy, etc. Psychologically, anxiety is recognized as a “secondary emotion”, a layer on the surface of these deeper primary emotions, like the tip of an iceberg.

After we identify our anxiety, its triggers, and its root, reckoning with the underlying primary emotion(s) with the gospel will help us effectively break the power of our idols, kill the reaction of the flesh, receive healing and freedom, walk in step with the Spirit, and grow in godliness and resilience.



Other emotions that may manifest as anxiety include:

- Fear: Something more powerful than me could “extinguish” me.
- Grief: Loss of security, relationship, hope, normalcy, etc.
- Anger: Injustice happened to me or others.
- Jealousy: Something that is rightfully mine is threatened to be taken from me.
- Envy: Someone else has what I want to have for myself.
- Shame: I am not trustworthy and therefore not worthy of belonging; something is wrong with me.
- Despondency (denial and/or hopelessness): The reality is too painful to face, and I see no way out.

Goal:

Identifying, processing, and reckoning with our emotions in such a way that produces “godly” rather than “worldly” sorrow, toward repentance, reckoning, and reconciliation (2 Corinthians 7:8-13).

Practice:

- Identify and process emotions with the same practice you used to identify and process anxiety, listed in the above section Identifying and Processing Anxiety.
- After you identify any given emotion and process its root, you will likely have some intuitional idea of the spiritual reality that it is pointing you toward.
- Next, there may be a real problem that we need to reckon and resolve with God and other people (see the next section).



Reckoning with Emotions

and the realities they reveal

Reckoning with the realities that our emotions reveal will lead us to atonement to resolve them. However, first, we need to know what atonement is and what it is not. Atonement is the central miracle and resource of our emotional and spiritual reckoning, through the death of Jesus Christ on the cross in our place as the perfect sacrifice required because of our depravity (Leviticus 16; Hebrews 9 - 10; 1 John 2:1-2).

Emotions are not wrong in and of themselves. However, negative emotions often are a result of our interactions with depravity and suffering because of sin (whether ours or another person's), the curse, and spiritual forces of evil in the world (Ephesians 2:1-3). Therefore, in reckoning with our emotions, we will interact with and resolve these very issues of sin, the curse, and spiritual forces of evil through atonement.

Even if we do not intentionally reckon with our emotions and their spiritual realities, we will subconsciously seek to resolve them in some other way, which may provide a sense of relief in the moment but will not resolve the core spiritual problem. For example, our culture denies the reality of "sin" with a sense of shamelessness; however, if someone breaks the cultural code of what is deemed to be honorable, they are "canceled" (shamed). This is a sort of "atonement"—the perpetrator is demanded that they pay for their sins, and vengeance is justified. Yet, worldly "justice" is never satisfied. Nic has called these other human ways of resolving our depravity The Five Furies of False Atonement. The Five Furies include:

- False Remorse: Experience guilt without repentance
- False Confession: Narrate or ruminate without ownership
- False Atonement: Make every sacrifice except the one demanded
- False Reconciliation: Seek guilty and flattering company
- False Justification: Condemn the just to justify yourself



In contrast, atonement's reckoning through the gospel is God's holistic response to our depravity, encompassing realities and effects of sin, suffering, and evil. For those who believe in him for holistic salvation, encompassing identity, security, worth, and godliness, in His final act of atonement on the cross, Jesus addressed and conquered the power of the following:

- Misfortune: The cross is the greatest misfortune that ever happened. It is the most “the world shouldn’t be this way” that has ever been. God is one with you in misfortune, and in accepting it for His glory and our ultimate, eternal good.
- Victimization: The cross is the greatest injustice and victimization that has ever happened—perfect innocence betrayed by complete treachery and corruption. God is with you in your victimization, and atonement takes injustice cosmically seriously.
- Perpetration: Jesus died for the perpetrator instead of destroying them. Jesus could have called angels to kill them and save Himself from death, but said, “Father forgive them, they don’t know what they are doing.”

Goal:

Reckon and resolve with God and others the spiritual realities that your emotions indicate.

Practice:

- Think of something mild that you had negative emotions about this week. It could be the same thing as the sections above, just moving deeper toward resolution.
- Identify and process emotions (see above).
- Identify and repent of any of the Five Furies.
- Seek atonement with God and others for misfortune, victimization, or perpetration through prayer, confession, and forgiveness.



Engaging the Spiritual Battle (Even Further)

with the Son of God, the Spirit, and the Scriptures

As whole human beings, we recognize that anxiety affects us physically, emotionally, and relationally. As Christians, we know that we are spiritual beings, and so the anxiety we face is also spiritual in nature, even as it must be addressed at all other levels of our being.

Yet, exhortations in response to acute anxiety such as “remember your identity in Christ” or “do not be anxious” land as platitudes rather than deep, healing remedies that bring calm and peace. The Scriptures are not band-aids to be slapped on to the surface of the skin. Jesus is the Bread of Life (John 6:35) and the Living Water (John 4:10; 7:37-39). He is a medicine for the sick that is meant to be ingested into the inner being. “In him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28). And the Word of God “is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12).

When experiencing anxiety, it is common to feel as a Christian that we “just need to trust [or love, or know, etc.] Jesus more”. Or study the Scriptures and apply more devotion. You may have even been told something like that.

What does that even mean? What is “more,” and how do we practically get there?

These are exercises for applying the gospel and the Scriptures to help you engage in the spiritual battle against anxiety. (There are additional spiritual practices listed in the first section on *Grounding in Security and Identity*.)



Applying Jesus to our Anxieties and their Sources

Goal:

Trust in the person of Jesus in our moments of anxiety.

Practices:

- **Jesus as Savior King to our idols** (Matthew 6): what are we clinging to for salvation instead of Jesus? We don't need that idol. Jesus is both King and Savior – he rules, liberates, and vindicates those that trust in him.
- **Jesus as Prophet to our lies or avoidance** (John 6): what are we believing about God, ourselves and others, suffering, and the nature of this world that are false and filling our minds and hearts with false expectations – making the gap between our expectations and reality a breeding ground for anxieties?
- **Jesus as Priest to our shame** (Hebrews 4:14-16): what failure or sense of unworthiness makes us feel like we need to hide, and so isolates us from ourselves and others, and keeps us from really turning wholeheartedly to God for help and comfort? How are we avoiding God's forgiving grace or seeking to self-atone for that which Jesus already died?
- **Jesus as shepherd to our uncertainty** (Ezekiel 34; John 10:11-18): Are we on our own or do we believe that God is with us as a Father in his providence, as the Son as a shepherd, and the Spirit as a counselor?
- **Jesus as vine to our dryness** (John 15; Romans 8): Do you feel dry, like you are asked to produce something but don't have the resources to do so? Jesus is the vine, and we are connected in his life to the Father.
- **Jesus as resurrected one to our fear of death** (Hebrews 2:15): How is fear of death and loss (both physical and otherwise) in operation over our lives? Jesus is the Resurrection and the life and can put away our fear of death.
- **Jesus the steward to our meaningless life** (Hebrews 3): Does our life feel futile or meaningless? Jesus was a steward over all God's house, who did the will of God's harvest, unto death, as "food" for his heart (John 4). He saw it as a



pursuit of joy even in the shame, futility, and humiliation (Hebrews 12:1-3). We are caught up into his mission and stewardship when we are his.

- **Jesus the physician to our trauma** (Greek for “wounds”), sin, and sickness: Do you feel too broken and shattered to be healed or redeemed? Jesus came for the sick, broken and hurting. These wounds aren’t a mark against him, and they don’t put us outside of his concern. The Doctor comes for the sick (Luke 5:31-32).
- **Jesus the preacher and good news to the poor in spirit** (Matthew 5:3): Some of us are in spiritual poverty. We have no direction. No hope, no sense of who we are. We are weak, waify, vaporous, and vulnerable. Jesus has come to preach good news to the poor, both materially and spiritually. We do not need more money or to develop a co-dependent, transactional relationship with God or others to get what we feel we need to survive or to be good. We have “everything we need for life and godliness” through his “divine power” (2 Peter 1:3) When we are poor in spirit, then ours “is the kingdom of heaven”.
- **Jesus as the light in our darkness** (John 1:4-5, 8:12; 1 John 1:5-7): What is **hidden** that needs to be brought into the light? As humans, we are prone and tempted to hide our sin, wounds, and shame instead of bringing it into the light of life to be restored. Jesus shines light on darkness to expose it, not to humiliate and condemn, but to drive out the darkness with truth so that we might be restored to life and relationship with God and others—fully seen, fully known, and fully loved.
- **Jesus as the word in our formlessness and void** (Genesis 1:1-5; John 1:1-18): What is formless, void, and chaotic in our life? We all have tendencies that create or succumb to chaos, rather than bringing order, cultivation, and flourishing to created gifts. “Every good and perfect gift is from above” from the God who is steady; he doesn’t change based on chaos, ambivalence, or emptiness (James 1). The truth of his word in the Scriptures and his Incarnate word in Christ is steadfast and unchanging, providing structures and principles for substance and living.



- **Jesus as the mourner to the grieving** (John 11): we have his sympathy now, even though he is the restorer of all things in the future. His compassion for Mary was not based on the grief that Lazarus was going to stay dead, but that they had suffered the experience of dying and loss and the fear and helplessness that goes with it.

Redirecting Anxious Rumination to Intentional Attention

Goal:

Actively pursue God's peace and fight anxious patterns, not letting roads of anxiety become highways, but reversing this.

Practice:

Philippians 4:4-9 (NIBO) *Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers, 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. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me or seen in me – put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.*

Simple applications:

1. How can you direct your attention to God?
2. How can you direct your attention to the admirable?
3. How can you direct your attention to worthy models?



Applying Scripture to Sources of Anxiety

Goal:

Engage in the spiritual battle for peace and freedom from anxiety by integrating biblical clarity and truths from Scripture into our daily thoughts and actions in response to anxiety.

Practice:

Each of the following Bible verses include a specific action or direction we should follow. Ignoring these instructions will lead to negative consequences. Alternatively, learning to act on Biblical counsel will result in a life that grows closer God and closer to His intentions for you.

From each verse, what are the daily actions that you do or could do to further live a victorious and anxiety free life?

1 Peter 5:8-9

⁸ Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

2 Corinthians 2:5-11

⁵ If anyone has caused grief, he has not so much grieved me as he has grieved all of you to some extent—not to put it too severely. ⁶ The punishment inflicted on him by the majority is sufficient. ⁷ Now instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. ⁸ I urge you, therefore, to reaffirm your love for him. ⁹ Another reason I wrote you was to see if you would stand the test and be obedient in everything. ¹⁰ Anyone you forgive, I also forgive. And what I have forgiven—if there was anything to forgive—I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for



your sake,¹¹ in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.

Ephesians 6:11-18

¹¹ Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. ¹³ Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. ¹⁴ Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, ¹⁵ and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷ Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.¹⁸ And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.

Philippians 4:8-9

⁸ Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. ⁹ Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

James 1:5-7

⁵ 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. ⁶ But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. ⁷ That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord.



Resolving Anxiety in Relationships

Our anxieties and their roots are triggered and manifested in relationships with God and others. After we ground ourselves physically, identify and process emotion, and then reckon with the meaning of those emotions through atonement, we will be left to face the realities revealed in the contexts of our relationships and communities.

We are anxious in our relationships with God and others when our perceptions aren't tuned to God's reality of our identity and security. We then perpetuate chronic anxiety, or a relational dynamic rooted in reactivity, with our false perceptions of reality.

Our perceptions of reality are formed from our earliest experiences in relationships and communities: our families. And our perceptions have opportunity to be re-formed to God's realities in the formational community of the local church and relationships with our spiritual mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers.

This requires great courage, rooted in security, integrity and humility. When chronic anxiety is the relational dynamic operating in a group, the terrifying reality is that it will feel normal, even if people exhibit signs of stress. It requires courage to directly face collective anxiety, choose to participate in a different way, and form communities of peace, mercy, reconciliation and unity.

Spaces and Generators of Relational Anxiety

As we've progressed through this packet, we've seen that there are four spaces that anxiety spreads:

1. The space in me
2. The space between me and another
3. Space inside of the other (you can't change this one)



4. The space between others

Though the particular manifestation of anxiety in an individual or group might vary, there are common principles and generators of chronic anxiety that are generally applicable, including (but not limited to!):

- Control
- Perfection: Performance
- Authority: Always having the answer
- Needing to be needed: Being there for people
- Approval: And the inclusion that attends it

Goal:

Detangle the four spaces to sort through the anxiety existing in each space. Failing to distinguish between these will cause us to "over function" - to carry what is not ours to carry. This harms us, the person who should take responsibility, and the dynamic in our relationship and related relationships.

Practice:

- Think of a situation of relational or external sources of anxiety (refer to the 30 universal sources of anxiety, Appendix B.
- Reflect on the following detangling questions:
 - What is mine to carry? What part of this is my responsibility?
 - What is theirs to carry?
 - What is God's to carry?



Listening as a Non-anxious Presence

Another way that we affect relational anxiety is becoming a calm presence in the face of someone else's anxiety. We cannot fix or control someone else's level of anxiety; we can affect its impact on chronic anxiety.

Goal:

Respond to the anxiety in another person by listening and being a calm presence. Listening can have numerous postures, for example: to defend, to hijack, to fix, to learn. Only listening to learn can de-escalate chronic anxiety. It is the only way to personally connect emotionally sufficiently to affect the anxiety of the other. Most people will listen to someone who is anxious for a few minutes and then stop them and give them pithy advice. This is a normal human tactic, and it is usually a reaction of anxiety and discomfort in us, and alienating for the person expressing their anxiety. It will normally increase their anxiety. Telling people to "have more faith" (or some form of that advice) tends to alienate them and increase their resistance.

Practice:

1. With a partner or in a group, use a "talking piece", or an object that signals one turn to talk, to discuss a particular topic that you have mutually agreed on (this can also be used in small groups or other ministry settings!).
2. The goal is to share feelings, thoughts, and experiences, not arrive at the "right answer". Remember, if this is a relational space for personal sharing, then this is a "feelings conversation" in which we are practicing processing our emotional experiences with God and others. If we don't know that's the goal, listening to others can feel frustrating, because at times the conversation won't feel cohesive or "logical". But also, feelings conversations need a framework or structure so that we don't derail and cause increased anxiety, so next we'll talk about some guidelines to structure our sharing.



3. Take turns going around the circle by passing an object (rock, pen, or something symbolic). Feel free to pass when it comes to your turn; you are not required to share. Taking turns removes the anxiety of wondering if or when to jump in to share for the sharer, and feeling the anxious impulse to “fix” or respond to what someone else has shared for the listener. Just listen. It also sets sort of a naturally implicit timer, knowing you need to get to everyone in the group, or take turns with a partner.
4. Before you share, think: what is the most needful thing for me to share, either because it is 1.) the vulnerable thing (what it meant versus what happened), 2.) only one thing versus every detail, or 3.) you are scared to share anything at all.

Relational Pathways to Prevent and Resolve Anxiety

Finally, God has created us as relational beings, and though the capacity for loving relationships has been marred by the fall, it is restored by the power of the gospel. God has given us redemptive relational pathways and practices that are rooted in how God has created us to live in peace with one another, and because of that, they often prevent or alleviate internal anxiety by cutting to the heart of the sources of relational anxiety.

Goal:

Operate out of security, integrity and humility in our relationships to prevent and resolve anxiety that stems from perceptions, dynamics, or conflict in relationships.

Practices:

Look at the 30 Universal Sources of Anxiety. Which relational sources of anxiety do you find yourself experiencing? How can you apply one of the following practices toward a healthier, stronger, more peaceful relationship?

- Bonding is a function of loving and being loved. If you frequently feel anxious about relationships:



- Reflect on whether you feel that you belong to anyone, and if so, to whom? What is the nature of your relationship? Is it a healthy bond to nurture?
- Reflect on whether there is a bond that you could cultivate more.
- Reflect on whether there is a bond you fear losing. Why is that? What is within your control in that relationship to cultivate, and what isn't? How might you submit your stewardship of that bond to the Lord?
- Practice presence and proximity with the other person or with the group you feel you belong to or that you could belong to. Presence and proximity over time form bonds. Practices of presence:
 - One communal meal each day (Earley, 2020)
 - One hour of conversation with another person each week (Earley, 2020)
- Boundaries are about ownership and responsibility, but they're also about love. Boundaries are not walls; instead, they help determine what resources you can give toward the bonds of love, and what resources you need to receive. They determine what is in your realm of stewardship, and what is in the realm of someone else's.

Think about your yard, and your neighbor's yard. Maybe you have a fence in between, but each of you (should) know where your space begins and ends, and consequently, you should know where your responsibilities begin and end. It is your job to mow your lawn, but it is not your job to mow your neighbor's lawn. Resentment often occurs when your neighbor expects you to attend to their responsibilities, and especially when you aren't good at saying "no" and staying within your boundaries when it is necessary.

However, at times it can be healthy and loving to cross boundaries of responsibility. Let's say your neighbor has had an accident and struggled to keep their lawn mowed. Although it is not your responsibility to mow their lawn,



Jesus's teachings on loving our neighbor can compel and inspire us to carry someone else's burden. It would be healthy and helpful to willingly take on that extra responsibility of caring for your neighbor's need as you have the resources to do so. Boundaries are all about knowing where we end and others begin, and when it is okay to cross those lines out of love.

One key sign of a boundary issue is resentment. Reflect:

- Do you feel resentment toward anyone? If so, why?
- What is the boundary you feel has been crossed?
- What might you be giving that you don't have the resources to give?
- What might you be trusting that can't be entrusted to that person?
- Is there a more productive and effective way you could cultivate trust in that relationship?
- What does ownership require? What does love command?
- Confession is an antidote to shame, because it draws us to acknowledge wrongdoing and face our need for atonement and re-connection to belonging. A confession is sincere and humble, taking ownership, rather than evading truth-telling through narrating, ruminating, explaining, excusing, or blame shifting. Confession happens in relationships and community. James 5:16 instructs us to "confess [our] sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective."
 - Confession starts in our relationship with God. Reflect and ask God: is there anything I need to confess? What would the Lord have you to do next in response to your confession?
 - Confession to God and others includes acknowledgement of action, that it was wrong, that it affected the other person (even if they haven't realized it), an apology, and how you intend to change. For example:
 - "I did [or said] _____"
 - "It was wrong"
 - "I can see it affected you in this way: _____"



- “I’m sorry”
 - “I will do _____ next time”
- Admittedly, we do not live in a culture where this practice is common. It can feel uncomfortable. It will be. I often start with: “this might feel a little uncomfortable, but I want to be upfront with you that...”
- Remember ownership: you can’t confess how someone else feels, what they have done, what their intentions were, etc.
- Of course, you can also confess your own feelings and the impact on you of someone else’s actions. That is within the realm of ownership, and they may not know until you share this with them.
- Forgiveness is facing the whole truth of a wrong that has been done and withholding vengeance. Forgiveness does not mean you forget what happened. Forgiveness does not mean you trust the other person with something that they cannot be entrusted with. Forgiveness must be pursued simultaneously with justice, which is different than vengeance. Practicing forgiveness includes the following steps (Keller, 2022, p. 9-10):
 - Name the trespass truthfully as wrong and punishable, rather than merely excusing it.
 - Identify with the perpetrator as a fellow sinner rather than thinking how different from you he or she is. Forgiveness is to will their good.
 - Release the wrongdoer from liability by absorbing the debt oneself rather than seeking revenge and paying them back.
 - Aim for reconciliation rather than breaking off the relationship forever, with the understanding that whether a relationship can be restored depends on the repentance of the person to whom forgiveness is extended.
- Justice is seeking to align reality with what is right and true; it is not always the same as being “fair”, which is to be equal. It is easy to feel anxious if something doesn’t feel “fair”; but justice is not a factor of equal portion, but of right portion. Seeking justice looks like speaking God’s realities and truths and letting



a process unfold where the truth wins out. It can't win out if we don't lovingly speak up. We seek justice by speaking up and acting for those who cannot speak or act for themselves, and who are victims of wrongdoing or misfortune (see Psalm 37, Isaiah 58, Romans 12:9-21).

Reflect:

- Can you think of an injustice occurring in your life right now, or in the life of another person?
 - Does the injustice you identified cause anxiety? How can you identify this?
 - Does the denial of injustice cause anxiety? What does this look like for you?
 - How can you take ownership in that situation, and pursue justice? Do you need to speak up or act in some way? What is one step you could take?
 - How do courage, integrity, and humility inform how you go about pursuing justice?
- Contentment is a cultivated state of delight in one's own lot that is an antidote to the destructive forces of jealousy and envy in relationships (see Psalm 16; 1 Timothy 6:6-10; Philippians 4:11-13).

Reflect:

- Do you feel resentment, envy, or jealousy toward another person?
- Why? What do they have that you don't, and why does that bother you? What do you fear you will lose, and why does that bother you?
- How has this caused anxiety for you in your life? How have you reacted out of anxiety instead of facing jealousy and envy?
- How might you need to reckon with these emotions and reconcile relationships with God and others?
- What is one thing you can do to cultivate contentment and peace in that area of your own life that you feel jealousy or envy over in the life of another?



Facing Anxiety in Communities

The kind of anxiety Steve Cuss refers to in his book *Managing Leadership Anxiety* (2019)—and that is rooted in the work of Edwin Friedman (2017) and Michael E. Kerr and Murray Bowen (1988)—is called chronic anxiety. This is a conceptualization of anxiety as a social contagion that affects how systems and groups of people automatically react to disruptions in feelings of normalcy and safety and conform to perceptions of the most anxious person in the group. However, when succumbed to, this leads to weakness instead of resilience. The antidote is a formational response of courage: to have the integrity and humility to do the right thing and act in security in the face of an automatic, chronically anxious response. Spiritually speaking, the antidote to chronic anxiety is emotional and spiritual maturity.

When we succumb to chronic anxiety, we will automatically seek relief by controlling social dynamics or protecting personal coping strategies. In short, chronic anxiety is a subconscious form of avoidance: avoidance of the pain of previous hurts, feeling inadequate, or the pain of facing what is required for maturity. Chronic anxiety avoids the pain that comes with taking responsibility for our lives and the pain that comes with healing and maturing. It is an attempt to secure our self-protective position rather than moving out in risk and exploration toward healing and maturity.

Chronic anxiety is powerful *because* it is subconscious. When we learn to intentionally recognize and face our own internal anxiety, we will not only experience internal peace—we will also grow stronger and reflect peace to others in community. It requires courage to respond differently from what is happening around us and redirect and reform the ethos of our social environment. For encouragement to face dynamics of chronic anxiety, explore Daniel 2:1-28; Matthew 5:1-16; 2 Timothy 3; Colossians 3.



Differentiation of Self & Togetherness

“Differentiation of Self” is a psychological term that is part of the same psychological theory and framework as chronic anxiety, which is family systems therapy. Spiritually translated, the process of “differentiation of self” is basically the process toward maturity. It requires the courage to develop security, humility, and integrity in one’s identity; and these things are all rooted in the power of the gospel and the Spirit to transform our old self to the new (Ephesians 4:20-23). Differentiation of self has an impact on our own internal anxiety but also on chronic anxiety. “The more differentiated a self, the more a person can be an individual while in emotional contact with the group” (Kerr & Bowen, 1988, p. 94). Further, “a person who has the courage to stand firm and not simply oppose others can have an amazingly constructive effect on an anxious group” (Kerr & Bowen, 1988, p. 105).

We are all somewhere on the spectrum between “undifferentiated” and “differentiated.” Murray Bowen’s Family Systems Practice framework lists qualities of a well-differentiated person (Kerr & Bowen, 1988, p. 107). These qualities translate spiritually; I’ve written some spiritual language for these categories either after the semi-colon or within parenthesis. Can you think of other parallels to spiritual maturity?

- Able to distinguish between thinking and feeling (p. 101); utilizes both faculties that lend themselves to hold in tension both knowledge and love
- Principle-oriented and goal-directed; has a distinct and established belief system and values
- Sure of beliefs and convictions but not dogmatic or fixed in their thinking; able to admit when they are wrong and change
- Capable of hearing and evaluating the viewpoints of others, and can discard old thoughts in favor of the new
- Listens without reacting and communicates without antagonizing others; temperate



- Secure within him/herself, functioning not affected by praise or criticism; secure
- Respects the identity of another without becoming critical or emotionally involved in trying to modify the life course of another (as in the process of discipleship and spiritual multiplication)
- Able to assume total responsibility for self and sure of his responsibility to others, he does not become overly responsible for others; bears one's own load, and lovingly helps carry the burdens of others when appropriate
- Realistically aware of his dependence on his fellow man and is free to enjoy relationships; is a participating part of the body that shares what we have with each other
- He does not have a "need" for others that can impair functioning, and he does not feel "used"; in reciprocal relationships of belonging
- Tolerant and respectful of differences, he is not prone to engage in polarized debates; doesn't get involved in quarrels and is not divisive
- Realistic in his assessment of others and not preoccupied with his place in the hierarchy; humble
- Expectations of self and others is also realistic; flees from idolatry
- Intense feelings are well tolerated and so he does not act automatically to alleviate them; bears suffering with perseverance
- His level of chronic anxiety is very low and he can adapt to most stresses without developing symptoms; is discerning, wise, and self-controlled

Self-differentiation and maturity are necessary for reciprocal relationships ("togetherness").

Chronic anxiety leads us to control or self-protect in relationships (among other reactions). Maturity requires a different response. Some of the social characteristics of chronic anxiety (or spiritual immaturity) and its effects on a group are listed below, followed by what is required for maturity. The list includes underlying principles and patterns that are at the root of the sources of external anxiety in *Managing*



Leadership Anxiety by Steve Cuss, and the list is surely not exhaustive. We list Scriptures in the sections below to give context and to show that these are human dynamics that God has been addressing throughout the history of revelation, even though the psychological concepts and language may be relatively new. Can you think of any other principles from Scripture that could be added?

- Coercion
 - Maturity requires reciprocal receiving and giving rooted in freedom and love (2 Corinthians 9:7-8).
- Chaos and drama
 - This might involve “triangulation,” but could be broader than that. Triangulation is when there are “too many cooks in the kitchen” of a relationship. For example, the emotional process or “problem” itself can become the basis of the relationship, like a third person in the relationship, such that it must exist for there to feel like there is a relationship. Or another person gets pulled into a relationship where they aren’t directly involved, which alleviates the anxiety in the relationship between two others (gossip, self-justification, over responsibility, etc.). Triangulation *isn’t* the case when more than two people are involved in a relational situation that *does* directly involve and impact more than two people.
 - Maturity requires honesty (speaking the truth in love), integrity, and “living a quiet life” (1 Thessalonians 4:11-12).
- Scapegoating
 - One person is the problem vs. all in the unit contribute (See: Jesus Christ - Hebrews 9-10; Leviticus 16:20-28).
 - Maturity requires true confession, forgiveness, and reconciliation of one’s own part. Maturity relies on atonement from the only one who can provide it, Jesus, rather demanding “payment” from self or others.
- Isolation or codependency:



- Emotional detachment from relationships is not the same as “self-differentiation,” it is isolation. And emotional dependency on another person’s emotional state is not “togetherness,” it is codependency.
- Maturity requires appropriate bonding *and* boundaries (Galatians 6:5) so that sincere love and trust can freely flourish (Romans 12).
- Conflict with a brother in Christ
 - Conflict is to be expected in relationships, especially between two people with secure identities who may also have different personalities, experiences, backgrounds, etc.
 - Since we all grew up with different experiences of conflict, to clarify, a disagreement is not the same as a fight or abuse of power in a relationship. Emotional reactivity (yelling, etc.) or coercion to comply may be a sign of “conflict,” but it is not a sign merely of differences between two people; usually there is something deeper going on that must be addressed. Also, these emotional outbursts should not become “expected” as what is normal, and people should not become resigned to the presence of emotional outbursts or coercion in relationships. Denial is also a sign of conflict, but it is not a productive way to resolve it. Denial will instead entrench harmful patterns and confuse reality.
 - Maturity requires lovingly seeking to restore the relationship. If your brother will not be reconciled, it *might* reveal a case of wickedness or foolishness, unlike a brother who has wronged you but who repents and changes their actions (Matthew 18:15-20).
- Catching the “social contagion” of chronic anxiety
 - The “social contagion” of chronic anxiety is a reaction that is from the flesh, sin, worldliness, etc. These are often cases of either foolishness or wickedness (see Proverbs for more on these principles), both of which cause harm in communities, not only individual relationships.



- Maturity requires speaking the truth into the situation and holding someone at an appropriate relational association to prevent harm or confusion in the group. This is not primarily an act of self-protection, but a courageous act that seeks to align others with reality—such that each is reaping what they each have sown (Galatians 6:7-9)—and provide them an opportunity to change course. When we enable harmful behavior, we prevent them from the opportunity to know that it is wrong, repent, and believe.
- For those who don't repent and believe, this is what the justice of the Lord is, that they "store up vengeance for themselves" when moments of grace are received with an unrepentant, hardened heart (Romans 2:5).
- For more examples, see Jesus' response to Pharisees throughout the Gospels, 1 Corinthians 5, 2 Thessalonians 3:11-15, 1 Timothy 6: 3-12, 2 Timothy 2:14-26; 3:1-13; 4:2-5.

Integration: Receive, Redeem, Reject

The field of psychology, like other scientific fields, observes what God has already made. Because psychology and theology use different language, it can feel like we're talking about different human dynamics; however, people in the field of psychology are coming up with terms to describe what they discover about *God's* creation and truths (though they may come to different conclusions about the solutions to human problems). This means that as Christians, we need to think critically and integrate what we learn by determining what of psychological knowledge we can receive, what we can redeem, and what we must reject, based on the foundation of the gospel and the Scriptures. This will determine how we are to respond in spiritual maturity (godliness).

Goal:

Identify the dynamics of chronic anxiety and the courageous response of maturity in social situations and identify how to respond in a spiritually mature way.



Practice:

Pick one of these Scriptures to read and reflect on. Where do you see dynamics of chronic anxiety at work in relationships or communities, and what is the response of spiritual maturity?

- Paul and Peter: Galatians 2:11-21
- Saul and Samuel: 1 Samuel 13:6-15
- Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar: Daniel 2:1-28

Facing What We Bring into Communities

We all bring with us the ways we have been formed in our first community, the family—whether we are aware of it or not. And remember, chronic anxiety is most powerful in its effect when it is most unrecognized for what it is. One of the first ways to affect and prevent the level of chronic anxiety in a room is to consciously identify and face the patterns and reactions of chronic anxiety that you bring into communities based on the perceptions formed in childhood and core memories.

Goal:

Face and resolve our own anxieties so that we can bring immunity and balm for socially contagious chronic anxiety to our communities.

Practice:

One way to recognize patterns that we subconsciously perpetuate, and intentionally respond differently, is to reflect on the relational “norms” and patterns formed in our family of origin. This reflection process will not happen all in one sitting; rather it is a framework to use for intentionally noticing how you interact. Naming the dynamic is very powerful; it moves the reactions out of our subconscious and into the realm of intentionality and helps us see and address patterns that impact others.



1. Think of a relational pattern, dynamic or conflict in your life or ministry that leads to anxiety (refer to the 30 Universal Sources of Anxiety for some ideas if you feel stuck).
2. Is this source of anxiety familiar to you? Have you experienced it before in other relationships in the past?
3. Reflect on the dynamics of your familial relationships one by one, and notice any unspoken patterns, roles, expectations, values, or rules (for example: “it is shameful to cry in front of my mom” or “my brother received the most attention from my parents because he was good at football”). Often times, we generalize these patterns into values and rules that help us make sense of our experiences and keep us safe (for example: “crying is a sign of weakness, which is shameful” or “I need to perform well in order to be valuable and to be cared for”). These deeper values or rules are often subconscious, and tend to affect your life more when they are unnoticed and unnamed. This process will take time. We suggest tackling one relationship at a time, maybe in different devotional sessions in which you can pray and reflect with the Lord, or over several conversations with a mentor or friend. Reflect on the dynamics and interactions between:
 - You and your mom
 - You and your dad
 - Your mom and your dad
 - You and each of your siblings individually
 - You and the rest of your siblings as a unit
 - You and the whole family
 - Parents and children
 - Spouses
 - Generations (relationships between your parents and their parents, aunts and uncles, etc.)
 - Your reaction, response, and role in family conflict



4. How might these relational dynamics and patterns impact how you view God and how you relate with God? Are there any patterns that you noticed in your familial relationships (especially with your parents) that you also see manifesting in your relationship with or understanding of God?
- For example: "my brother received the most attention from my parents because he was good at football" --> rule: "I need to perform well in order to be valued and cared for by my parents" --> subconscious assumption that God works the same way: "I need to perform well and "be the best Christian I can be" in order for God to love me and care about me."



Conclusion

It's easy to feel that if we confront our anxiety, we're only going to find more darkness. The truth is that God is light, and he is exactly the Person we need and want to be present with us to face our fears. Confronting our anxiety is the doorway back to light and life. Jesus is that Way. His "perfect love casts out fear" (1 John 4:18). And his perfect love is to be experienced and received in our inner being, and then reflected into the world. Because of this, we can "consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever [we] face trials of many kinds, because [we] know that the testing of [our] faith produces perseverance." May we "let perseverance finish its work so that [we] may be mature and complete, not lacking anything" (James 1:2-3).

Numbers 6:24-26

"The LORD bless you and keep you;
the LORD make his face shine on you
and be gracious to you;
the LORD turn his face toward you
and give you peace."



Appendices

1. Appendix A: Common Rule diagram
2. Appendix B: 30 universal sources of anxiety by Steve Cuss
3. Appendix C: Feelings Wheel
4. Appendix D: Scriptures Referenced
5. References



Appendix A: The Common Rule Diagram

LOVE OF GOD

Another way to look at the habits is as they pertain to love of God. You were made to love and be loved by God. Only in the light of his love will you finally see who you really are, feel how you are supposed to feel, and discover what you should do with your days.

LOVE OF NEIGHBOR

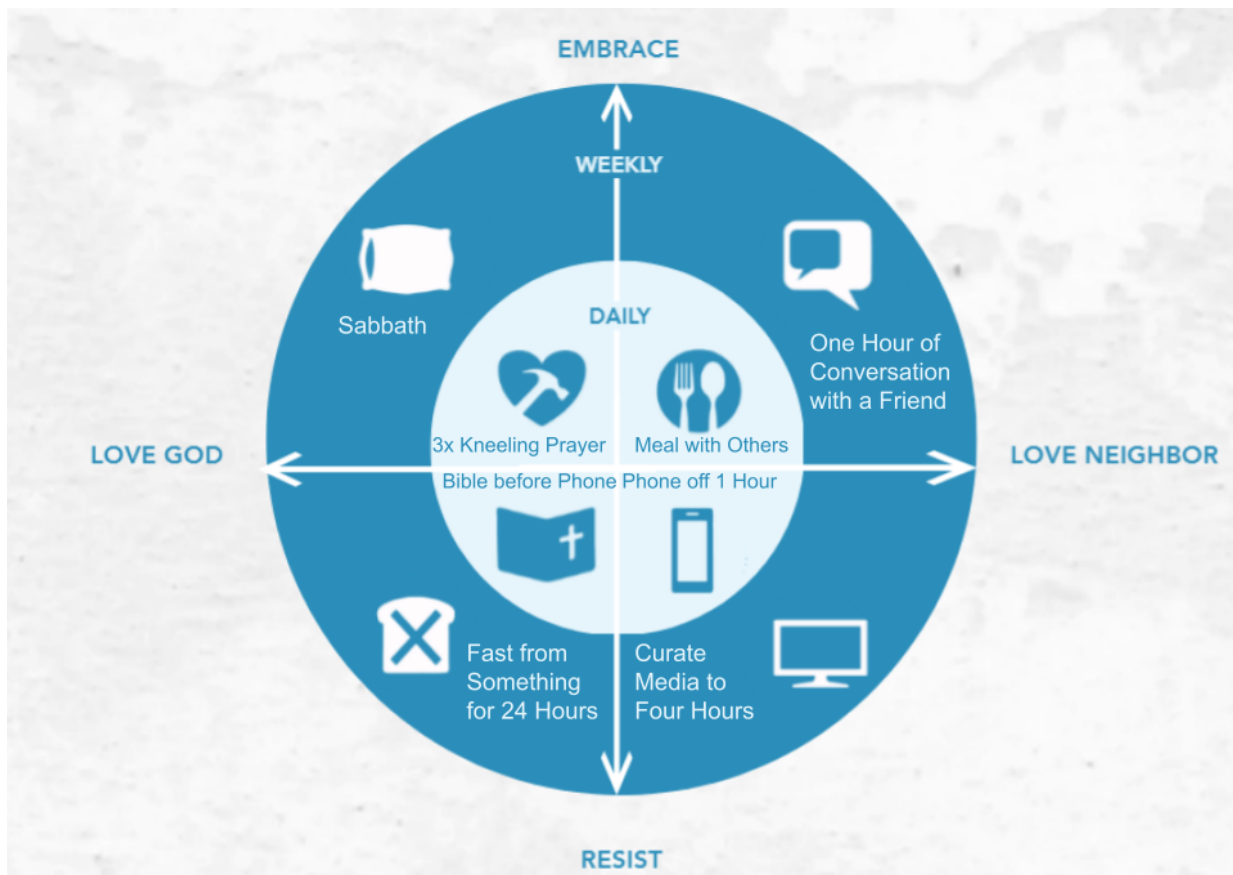
When we think of better habits, we often think about our own self-improvement. Nothing could be further from the purpose of the Common Rule. These habits are meant to be practiced with others for their sake.

EMBRACE

Embrace is a reminder that there is much good in the world God made. God's presence—not his absence—is the primary fact of the world. That we need each other—not that we harm each other—is the primary truth of being human.

RESIST

When we practice resistance, we acknowledge that evil and suffering are very real, though they aren't how the world was made to be. But remember that resistance has a purpose: *love*. The habits of resistance aren't supposed to shield you from the world but to turn you toward it.



The Daily Habits



ONE MEAL WITH OTHERS

We were made to eat, so the table must be our center of gravity. The habit of making time for one communal meal each day forces us to reorient our schedules and our space around food and each other. The more the table becomes our center of gravity, the more it draws our neighbors into gospel community.



SCRIPTURE BEFORE PHONE

Refusing to check the phone until after reading a passage of Scripture is a way of replacing the question "What do I need to do today?" with a better one, "Who am I and who am I becoming?" We have no stable identity outside of Jesus. Daily immersion in the Scriptures resists the anxiety of emails, the anger of the news, and the envy of social media. Instead it forms us daily in our true identity as children of the King, dearly loved.



KNEELING PRAYER THREE TIMES A DAY

The world is made of words. Even small, repeated words have power. Regular, carefully placed prayer is one of the keystone habits of spiritual formation and is the beginning of building the trellis of habit. By framing our day in the words of prayer, we frame the day of love.



ONE HOUR WITH PHONE OFF

We were made for presence, but so often our phones are the cause of our absence. To be two places at a time is to be no place at all. Turning off our phone for an hour a day is a way to turn our gaze up to each other, whether that be children, coworkers, friends, or neighbors. Our habits of attention are habits of love. To resist absence is to love neighbor.

The Weekly Habits



ONE HOUR OF CONVERSATION WITH A FRIEND

We were made for each other, and we can't become lovers of God and neighbor without intimate relationships where vulnerability is sustained across time. In habitual, face-to-face conversation with each other, we find a gospel practice; we are laid bare to each other and loved anyway.



FAST FROM SOMETHING FOR TWENTY-FOUR HOURS

We constantly seek to fill our emptiness with food and other comforts. We ignore our soul and our neighbor's need by medicating with food and drink. Regular fasting exposes who we really are, reminds us how broken the world is, and draws our eyes to how Jesus is redeeming all things.



CURATE MEDIA TO FOUR HOURS

Stories matter so much that we must handle them with utmost care. Resisting the constant stream of addictive media with an hour limit means we are forced to curate what we watch. Curating stories means that we seek stories that uphold beauty, that teach us to love justice, and that turn us to community.



SABBATH

The weekly practice of sabbath teaches us that God sustains the world and that we don't. To make a countercultural embrace of our limitations, we stop our usual work for one day of rest. Sabbath is a gospel practice because it reminds us that the world doesn't hang on what we can accomplish, but rather on what God has accomplished for us.



Appendix B: 30 Universal Sources of Anxiety

Some anxiety sources are unique to us based on wiring, assumptions and upbringing etc. These sources below are universal to us all. We use this list with its brief descriptions to help a team or leader 'diagnose' the anxiety dynamics going on. Frequently, as someone shares a case, we listen for these sources and find that the team is in 7 or more of these dynamics. No wonder they are anxious. Diagnosing and then untangling these sources can bring quick relief and freedom.

Internal Sources of Anxiety:

These sources are 'first space' sources – the anxiety in you. They are common to us all and will generate anxiety as long as we are in their grip. Naming and moving out of them is the path to freedom.

Double bind: On the surface, it is a lose-lose situation. On a deeper level, a pure double bind is two conflicting messages where by succeeding at one means you fall at another. If you struggle to make a decision, even about simple matters, and often regret the decision you made, you may be prone to double binds.

Giants on your shoulders: The people in your life, past or present, who you believe are condemning you and your actions. When meeting with someone, you are trying to please the giants, rather than connecting with the real person.

Values violation: You often know your unspoken values by your over reaction when someone violates one. The goal is not to lower your values, it is to name your value and move through the violation to stay connected with the person.

Judgement: You cannot judge someone and be present to them at the same time. Make a list of the types of people you judge. You will be surprised at how petty some of the traits are. Judgement is the most obvious evidence of self righteousness.



Imposter Syndrome: The belief that someone better and smarter will come along and expose that you don't belong in your role OR the belief that you actually are not fit for the role you are in.

Doubt in God/Faith shift: Deconstructing faith can be scary, especially if you are a faith leader where people's faith depends on yours. You feel pressure to represent belief in God, regardless of the state of your own.

Isolationism: The need to feel alone in order to receive pity or feel self-pity. An insidious form of self-righteousness.

Exceptionalism: The belief that no one can do it better than you. If you are always the smartest person in the room, you are prone to exceptionalism.

Blind spot knowledge: Knowledge everyone around you has about you that you do not have about yourself. Often, you learn it in a public setting and sometimes, as soon as you are told it, you know it is true, but have never known it before. You feel exposed and often move into shame.

Making a mistake in public: All leadership is vulnerable and almost all mistakes are made in public. The ability to recover from a mistake in public and put yourself out there again is paramount for ongoing health.

Being stuck: Applying 'more of the same' or 'try harder' to any scenario with waning results.

Inner Critic: The inner voice of condemnation that often holds us to an untenable expectation.

Not Knowing What To Do/Having To Do Something: Especially for a leader whose mistakes are often public, this will always generate anxiety.

Scarcity: lack of time, money, people. But we must proceed. Long term scarcity can move you into a 'scarcity mindset.'



New (location, job etc): While 'new' can be exciting, it can also be lonely as you adjust to the place/culture/people and as you build relationships etc.

Grief: Many leaders struggle to allow themselves the grieve loss. Grief has its own agenda and timeline and radical acceptance and self-kindness are required.

Ambiguity: Unclear situation, unprecedented circumstance, unknown timeline.

External Sources of Anxiety

These sources come not from within us, but often between us. Naming them, sometimes even to the person you are anxious about, and then moving out of them is the path to freedom from their grip.

Rigid Communication: Some personalizes sound more certain than they feel. You can notice absolutes, superlatives and force of language in yourself and others and attempt to keep communication more fluid.

Thought-Terminating Cliches: When a person 'declares reality' in a way that ends the conversation and paints a nuanced topic with a simplistic broad brush.

Phantom Strike: A criticism coming from someone representing an unnamed mob of unknown size that you do not have access to. It is some form of, 'Me and a bunch of people have been talking and we think...'

Cognitive Dissonance: When you and another person have the same set of objective facts, but hold radically different interpretations of them. You attempt to 'think your way to seeing it their way.' You are unable to make sense of their interpretation and behavior. More insight is rarely the answer.

Paradox: A literal impossible situation. A common complaint of a parent, 'I don't want my children to clean their rooms, I want them to want to.' That is a paradox. A child can clean a room, but making them want to want to clean their room is impossible.



Mixed Message: Two opposite messages at the same time. Most sarcasm and passive aggression is a mixed message. It generates anxiety because you do not know which message to receive and which to reject. Choosing one and ignoring the other is typically the path forward.

Relational Double Bind: On the surface, it is a lose-lose situation. On a deeper level, a pure double bind is a paradox and a mixed message – a literal impossible situation. The person sends you two conflicting messages where if you succeed in one, you fail in the other. These can be difficult to spot. Beware people who keep shifting the target on you, people who argue in a circular fashion or people who never let you 'win.'

Leadership Landmine: Unwittingly causing offense with a group. You are in a meeting leading an exciting initiative and someone suddenly is hurt. You are changing something you did not know is precious to them. You have stepped on a landmine.

Triangulation: A relationship with three or more people that should only have two people in it. Gossip is always triangulation, for example. Beware people who want you to keep a secret against another. Just by listening to them, they may triangle you against another person.

Imbalance of power and responsibility: You are required to do something you are not empowered to do. You have responsibility but no authority or resource to accomplish what you are responsible for.

Under Functioning/Over Functioning Dynamic: a pattern between two people where one drops a ball and the other picks it up. The over functioner feels self righteous, the under functioner feels shame. When the over functioner reaches a limit and stops, the under functioner feels abandoned because the over functioner is the one who changed the dynamic.

Sabotage: Most groups resist change and will resist a leader. Sometimes a veteran leader sabotages the fresh ideas of a newer leader.



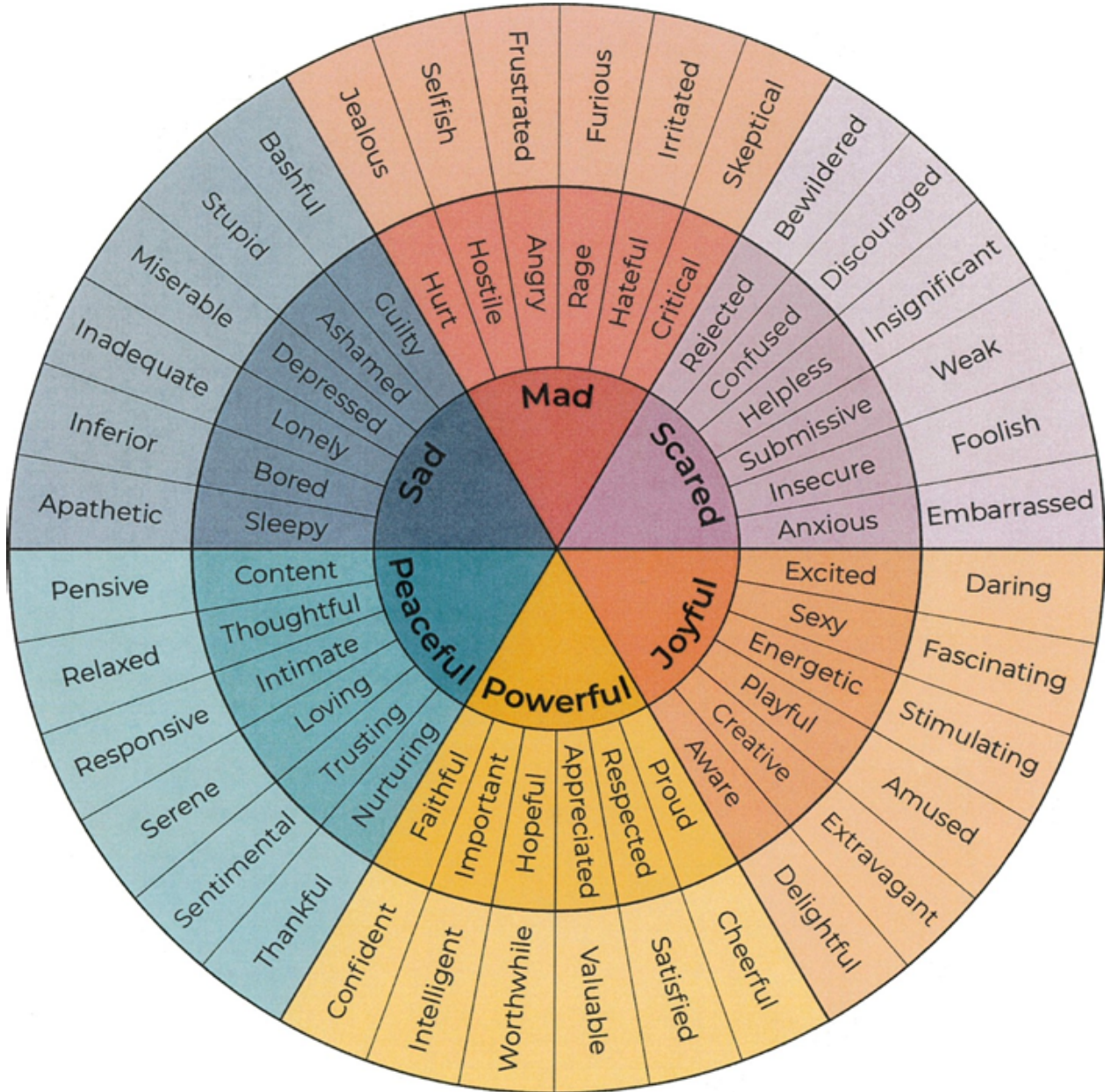
Shifting a Clear Target: When you meet with someone believing they want to resolve, but they keep shifting the target on you. Some people don't keep track of their word, or because they are people pleasers, shift the target between meetings. Anxiety ensues.

Same Species Syndrome: A previous leader wounded me, so anyone like that previous leader is suspect and not to be trusted because they are the 'same species' as the wounder.

Secondhand Criticism: The impact on a spouse when the leader is criticized. Because the spouse is not in the arena fighting directly, they are impacted.



Appendix C: The Feelings Wheel



Appendix D: Scriptures Referenced

2 Peter 1:3-11	Hebrews 4:14-16	Ephesians 6:11-18
Psalms 37:3	Ezekiel 34	Philippians 4:8-9
Psalms 37:4	John 10:11-18	James 1:5-7
Matthew 5:44	John 15	James 5:16
Galatians 6:5-9	Romans 8	Psalms 37
Exodus 16	Hebrews 2:15	Isaiah 58
Matthew 6:19-34	Hebrews 3	Romans 12:9-21
Ezekiel 8	John 4	Psalms 16
John 2	Hebrews 12:1-3	1 Timothy 6:6-10
2 Corinthians 7:8-13	Luke 5:31-32	Philippians 4:11-13
Leviticus 16	Matthew 5:3	Daniel 2:1-28
Hebrews 9-10	John 1:4-5	Matthew 5:1-16
1 John 2:1-2	John 8:12	2 Timothy 3
Ephesians 2:1-3	1 John 1:5-7	Colossians 3
John 6:35	Genesis 1:1-5	Ephesians 4:20-23
John 4:10	John 1:1-18	2 Corinthians 9:7-8
John 7:37-39	James 1	1 Thessalonians 4:11-12
Acts 17:28	John 11	1 John 4:18
Hebrews 4:12	Philippians 4:4-9	Matthew 18:15-20
Matthew 6	1 Peter 5:8-9	Romans 2:5
John 6	2 Corinthians 2:5-11	1 Corinthians 5



2 Thessalonians 3:11-15

2 Timothy 4:2-5

1 Timothy 6: 3-12

Galatians 2:11-21

2 Timothy 2:14-26

1 Samuel 13:6-15

2 Timothy 3:1-13



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