

April 16, 2020

Goodbye Anxiety

**Handling Circumstances Beyond
Our Control**

Finding Peace through Praise



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Handling Circumstances Beyond Our Control

“You’re ridiculously in charge of how you’ll respond to everything.”
- Pastor Shawn Beaty (Fresno Bee, April 11, 2019)

Basic Principles:

- 1. Our circumstances do not cause stress, anxiety, or depression. Our thoughts (beliefs) about our circumstances do.**

This simple yet powerful principle is based upon psychologist Albert Ellis’s A-B-C model of emotions, introduced in the mid-1950’s. His theory stated that our emotions are not the direct consequences of adversity. Instead, our emotions are the consequences of our beliefs.

Adversity (A) → Beliefs (B) → Emotions/Consequences (C)

- 2. God gives us the freedom and ability to control our thoughts. We can choose what we believe. The Apostle Paul offered the following guidance regarding our thoughts:**

“We take every thought captive and make it obedient to Christ.” - 2 Corinthians 10:5

“Be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” - Romans 12:2

“Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things.” - Philippians 4:8

*“You will keep in perfect peace, him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you.”
- Isaiah 26:3*

- 3. “Satan is like a saboteur looking for an opportunity to tinker with our minds...there is a war going on, and it’s of a spiritual nature.” – Adrian Rogers.**

“Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.” - 1 Peter 5:8

*“When he (the devil) lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.”
- John 8:44*

*“Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes.”
- Ephesians 6:11*

How to “Take Every Thought Captive” and “Be Transformed by the Renewing of Your Mind:

1. **Record:** When you feel negative emotions, journal your thought in a short statement.
2. **Re-evaluate:** Question the truth of the statement.
3. **Replace:** Write a statement that is based on God’s truth in the Bible to replace it.
4. **Rehearse:** Repeat the true statement whenever you catch yourself thinking the original, negative thought.

Types of Irrational Thinking that Create Stress, Anxiety, and Depression (especially during the COVID-19 pandemic):

1. **“Should” Thinking:** Holding the unrealistic belief that our circumstances should be exactly as we want them to be or expecting perfection. This type of thinking turns preferences and wants into absolute rules in the mind. These rigid expectations are usually expressed with words like “should,” “must,” “have to,” “must.” - often followed by an “if not” or “or else.” The difference between reality and unrealistic “should” statements creates stress, anxiety or depression.

Example:

“I should be able to do my job and homeschool my kids at the same time. If not, I will fail at my job and the kids will fail at school.”

To Challenge “Should” Thinking

Ask yourself:

- Am I expecting myself to be perfect?
- Am I expecting the situation to be perfect?
- Am I adding an ultimatum (“if not” or “or else”)?
- Do things have to be a certain way or is it just my preference?

Sample replacement statement:

“It’s okay if I can’t work and homeschool my children at the same time. This is temporary. God’s grace is sufficient.” (2 Corinthians 12:9)

2. **Catastrophic Thinking:** Blowing negative occurrences way out of proportion by assuming the worst-case scenario. This comes from evaluating a situation based on your emotions rather than facts. This intensifies panic, anxiety, and fear.

Example:

“I’m not feeling well. Oh no! It’s probably coronavirus! My life is at risk.”

To Challenge Catastrophic Thinking:

Ask yourself:

- Am I evaluating the situation based on my emotions or facts?
- Am I jumping to conclusions?
- Am I thinking in exaggerated terms?
- Is there an alternative way to think about this situation?

Sample replacement statement:

"There are only 265 confirmed cases out of 1 million people in my county. That's less than .03%. But ultimately, my health is in God's hands." (Psalm 147:3, Mark 10:52, Luke 8:50)

3. **"What If?" Thinking:** Excessive worry about the possibility of future events that haven't happened yet. Many people who suffer from stress, anxiety, or depression have highly analytical minds that can think of an infinite number of possibilities for any situation. Using this gift to think of only negative possibilities produces anticipatory anxiety.

Example:

"What if I don't get back to work in time, can't pay my bills, and lose my house?"

To Challenge "What If?" Thinking:

- What are the real chances of this happening?
- How often has this happened before?
- Would I be able to produce enough evidence to convince another person that this might happen?
- If I had to bet a thousand dollars for or against this happening, which way would I bet?

Sample replacement statement:

"I trust God to meet all my needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:19)

4. **"I Can't" Thinking:** Believing that the forces that govern your life circumstances are completely beyond your control. Believing we are powerless to make choices that will affect the important outcomes in our lives only compounds stress, anxiety, or depression.

Example:

"This situation is so overwhelming. I don't think I can handle it. I am completely helpless and out of control."

To Challenge "I Can't?" Thinking:

- Am I really powerless in this situation?
- Am I concentrating on my weaknesses instead of my strengths?
- What part of this situation is in my control?
- What actions can I take?

Sample replacement statement:

"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." (Philippians 4:13)

Activity:

Identify at least one thought that is causing you the most stress, anxiety, or depression right now. State it in a sentence or two. Place a check next to the type of irrational thinking it represents. Then write a true statement based on God's word to replace it.

Irrational (Untrue) Thought

Type of Thinking:

_____ **“Should” Thinking**

_____ **Catastrophizing**

_____ **“What if?” Thinking**

_____ **“I Can’t Thinking**

_____ **Other**

Replacement (True) Thought

“The one thing over which you have complete control is your thinking. Use it well.”
- Brian Tracy (Best-Selling Author and Speaker)

Finding Peace Through Praise

Paul and Silas In Prison Acts 16: 23-34

²³ After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. ²⁴ When he received these orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

²⁵ About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. ²⁶ Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone's chains came loose. ²⁷ The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. ²⁸ But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!"

²⁹ The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. ³⁰ He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

³¹ They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household."

³² Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. ³³ At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his household were baptized. ³⁴ The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole household.

Key points:

- God offers us spiritual freedom no matter how bad our outward circumstances seem. The more we place our faith in God, the more freedom we find from stress, anxiety, or depression.
- Like Paul and Silas, we can make the decision to praise God, despite being confined in bad circumstances. In doing so, we will experience inner freedom rather than fear or anxiety.
- We can experience physical freedom before God lifts our bad circumstances.
- Paul and Silas kept the jailer from killing himself. How can we focus on helping others during difficult times?
- Paul and Silas glorified God while in prison, which led to the salvation of the jailer's entire household. Does God have a higher purpose for each one of us that can only be achieved during the confinement of COVID-19?