

A man in a black tank top and shorts is shown from the side, hitting a large black heavy bag with his right arm. He is in a boxing stance. The gym has a wooden floor and brick walls. In the background, there are other boxing equipment like a red bag and posters on the wall. The lighting is dramatic, with a strong light source from the left creating a bright beam on the floor.

THE BATTLE WITHIN

STUDY GUIDE



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RESOURCES

As we dive into this series, "The Battle Within," we will be speaking on topics such as anger, depression, anxiety, thoughts, shame and other mental health battles.

At Crossroads, we have a Mental Health Team of volunteer local professionals and peer supporters who are called to bring awareness, compassion, connection and God's love to individuals, their families and their communities who are overcome by their mental health trials.

If you or someone you love is in need of people, information and tools to start the journey toward recovery, please get in touch with one of our partners listed below, or visit Next Steps in the lobby at Crossroads.

AVAILABLE SERVICES & CONNECTIONS:

Encompass Christian Counseling
(419) 289-0970

Family Life Counseling
(419) 774-9969

Appleseed Community Mental Health Center
(419) 281-3716

Richland County Mental Health
& Recovery Services Board
(419) 774-5811

Southeast Healthcare, Morrow County
(419) 949-2000

Morrow County Hospital
24/7 Crisis Intervention Support

INTRODUCTION

**Written by Pastor Paul O'Brien,
Care & Park Ave Campus Pastor**

Not sure if you've seen the movie *Saving Private Ryan*, but it opens with the D-Day landing. You see war in all its brutality and carnage. You see, as is often said, "war is hell." What would happen to a soldier that hit his head and got amnesia and didn't know why he was on a beach or what he was doing? What would happen to him as he wandered around? What would happen to him if he ended up thinking he could relax and just enjoy the beach?

Scripture teaches us that we're in a big, cosmic story, and it's true. It has a lot of similarities to fantasy and fairy tales, but it's actually a true story. The Bible even tells us about an evil dragon that wants to destroy, fire doesn't come out of its mouth though, but destructive lies do.

The reality of the battle we're in may not seem real, but the Bible tells us about it from Genesis 3 until Revelation 22. So, whether or not we see it, we are in a cosmic battle between good and evil, light and darkness, right and wrong, life and death, truth and lies. Does your life reflect the reality that we are in a cosmic war?

We live in enemy-occupied land. "The whole world lies in the power of the evil one" (1 Jn. 5:19). There is a god of this world that blinds people from seeing the goodness and glory of Jesus (2 Cor. 4:4). Many have sadly been

"deceived by the serpent's cunning"
(2 Cor. 11:3).

The Greek word for devil (διάβολος) is where we get the word diabolical. It means "slanderer" and "false accuser." Satan, the lord of this age, is rightly called the "deceiver of the whole world" and the "father of lies" (Rev. 12:9; Jn. 8:44 cf. Rev. 13:14; 18:23; 19:20; 20:3; 2 Cor. 11:3; 2 Thess. 2:9-11; 1 Tim. 2:14).

We are at war whether we realize it or not and losing the war looks like being "tossed to and fro" by waves of unhealthy teachings; it looks like us going back to our previous way of life and our deceitful desires (Eph. 4:22). Losing the battle looks like listening to Satan and believing his lies.

If Satan is the father of lies, if when he lies, he speaks from the deep reservoirs of who he is, then we must be well equated with the truth. So, how do we keep from getting destroyed? How do we stand and not fall? How do we fight the battle within? That's what we'll be looking at over the next couple of weeks.

THE BATTLE WITHIN

WEEK 1: I DECLARE WAR

**Written by Pastor Paul O'Brien,
Care & Park Ave Campus Pastor**

The Bible tells us that we have a war raging, and it's even raging within us. It's a battle of truth and lies. In this real cosmic war we're in, how do we keep from getting destroyed? How do we stand and not fall? Ephesians 6:10-20 has a lot to teach us.

I remember learning about Ephesians 6:10-20 as a kid at a church camp. In some ways, I think the cutesy armor that we made ruined it for me. I don't think that has to be the case, though. But I think for me, it kept me from seeing the seriousness and reality of what the passage is talking about. The realities that it refers to are not cute and harmless. It's war. A matter of life and death. The subject is serious.

It's important that we know a little bit about our enemies' nature because it helps us to know what our enemies' attacks are likely to be. Freaky attacks—like you see on the screen, like *The Exorcism of Emily Rose*—seem to be less common when faint and imperceptible attacks will do. Notice that Ephesians 2:2 talks about “the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience.” “The air” and “the spirit” are not seen. But that does not mean that they have no effect. I can't see the wind, but it can wreak destructive havoc. Satan's work is often subtle, but he

is always scheming, and scheming for our destruction (1 Pet. 5:8).

So, even as we are wise to know something of our enemy (that it's not ultimately Washington, or Planned Parenthood, or whatever) and his schemes, it's also vital that we know our Warrior. We need to take comfort in the fact that every being will bow to Jesus Christ, the exalted boss of the universe (Phil. 2:10-11). In reality it is Jesus who has all authority in heaven and earth (Matt. 28:18 cf. Eph. 1:21-22). And God has granted us power (Eph. 1:19; 6:10) and the complete armor (Eph. 6:13) we need to stand against Satan and his hordes' various attacks.

One of the main ways we fight the battle within, the battle against lies, is to tenaciously hold to the truth; or rather, be held by it. Truth is the belt that (see Is. 11:5; Eph. 1:13; 4:14-15, 20-21; 5:8-10) holds everything together and holds us up.

An illustration that has perhaps been overused is helpful. The banker knows fake money, how? Because she knows real money so well. We must know the truth so well that we can sniff out Satan's lies and see the reality of what they are.

PRAYER FOR THE WEEK

Father, You are powerful and good. Protect us and keep us from evil and help us rely on You as we fight the battle within. Help us hold to the truth and be mentally and emotionally healthy. We want to love and honor you with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.

BIBLE VERSE FOR THE WEEK

"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly." - John 10:10

DAILY STUDY

DAY 1 (Ephesians 6:10-12; James 4:7; 1 Pet. 5:8-9)

- In the battle that we face, who is our enemy, and how can we have victory?
- In your everyday life, are you living in a way that shows you are aware that you're at war; that you have an enemy who is set on destroying you? If so, what does this look like? If not, how are you going to change?

DAY 2 (Ephesians 6:13-14)

- Why is a belt important? What is its function?
- Truth is to be like a belt. In what ways is truth holding you together and fastened to you? How can you make sure truth continues to function in a healthy way in your life?
- We know temptation is sure to come. How are you preparing to combat it?

DAY 3 (Ephesians 6:15-16)

- Notice here that the armor we're given is not just defensive, it is also offensive. And it seems sharing the gospel is a big part of "combat." How does unashamedly sharing

the gospel helps strengthen us in our spiritual fight?

- Faith is the shield that protects us from the inevitable arrows of the enemy. The shield that Roman soldiers hid behind was a large rectangular about the size of a door. They could crouch behind it and be completely safe. We, however, don't have a door to hide behind. God is our shield (Deut. 33:29; Ps. 5:12; 18:2, 30; 28:7; 33:20; 2 Sam. 22:31). How does faith protect us from the evil arrows of Satan's lies?

DAY 4 (Ephesians 6:14-17)

- The righteousness Christ purchased for us is our breastplate (see Is. 59:17; Rom. 3:21-26; 6:13; Eph. 4:24; 5:1, 8-9). It gives us right-standing before God and motivates us to pursue practical and lived righteousness. Understanding we have Christ's clothes of righteousness on (1 Cor. 1:30; Phil. 3:9) helps protect against the enemy's slashing lies that would have us believe we're condemned. One of the chief ways Satan attacks us, is through the lie of condemnation. If we are in Christ, Romans 8:1 tells us, we are not condemned. That is the truth, whatever we may feel. How can you daily remind yourself and rejoice in the righteousness that you have in Jesus?
- Take some time today and memorize Romans 8:1.

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WEEK 2: THOUGHTS

**Written by Andrew Pacheco,
Clinical Counselor & Army Chaplain**

If our hands are filthy, we wash them. Before we use the dishes again, we scrub them. Before we take a bite into an apple, we rinse it off. Why? Because even an unseen, microscopic germ can create immense sickness and chaos.

Let's apply this to the battle over our thoughts. We have thousands of thoughts that filter through our mind every day, some healthy, some unhealthy. The enemy knows that if we ingest a toxic thought, he can create chaos in our life. When I say "ingest" I mean a thought that we choose to dwell on, a thought that we allow to absorb into the sacred space of our mind.

Feeling bitter or jealous? Probably ingested a toxic thought! Feeling anxious beyond control? Probably ingested a toxic thought! Keep acting in a manner that creates relational or emotional dysfunction? Guess who the culprit likely is... an ingested toxic thought! Why, because how we think directly impacts how we act and feel.

The enemy is aware of this and would love nothing more than to watch as we ingest one toxic thought after another, or perhaps even the same one repeatedly, until it brings destruction in our lives! Destroying our mental, emotional, behavioral, relational,

or spiritual well-being. Watching not only as we suffer, but as the collateral fallout adversely impacts others as well. Perhaps your thoughts are wreaking havoc in your life and the lives of those around you? If so, it's time to wage war against your thoughts! It's time to reclaim victory over the battlefield of your mind!

So, the question becomes, how can I gain victory over my thoughts? The first recommendation is to sanitize your thoughts. Just as we scrub the dishes or scrub our hands to get off the germs, we need to scrub down our thoughts. We sanitize our thoughts by Capturing, Renewing, and Resetting (CRR) our thoughts! CPR is for the heart, CRR is for the mind.

- **Capture:** God's word says we are to "take every thought captive to obey Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5). It's important to take inventory of the thoughts that are racing through our mind and analyze the fruit they produce, or the lack thereof. If you were to dump your thoughts out on a platter and examine them under a microscope, perhaps you would be surprised with how unsanitary your mind truly is. Full of greedy thoughts, jealous thoughts, lustful thoughts, idolatry thoughts, prideful thoughts, vengeful thoughts, selfish thoughts. When you notice a thought from the enemy that has somehow set up camp in your mind, don't feed it, don't offer it a negotiation deal, but capture it! The verse doesn't just say to capture it, we are to capture it... to obey Christ.

- **Renew:** Romans 12:2 tells us that we are transformed by the renewal of our minds. The key word in renewal is the word new.¹ We are to create new thoughts! If a thought is unsanitary, create a new one! Not a thought that aligns with the values of the world, nor a thought that is agreeable to the consensus of secular influence. But new thoughts that align with God's word and the finished work of Christ. Don't just stop at creating a new thought, but continue thinking of the new thought over and over again! Philippians 4:8 commands us to "think" about that which is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable and excellent. The command to "think" is ongoing, something that ought to be done continuously.

- **Reset:** We sanitize our thoughts by capturing them, creating new ones, and additionally resetting our minds to what the Holy Spirit desires. Romans 8:6 says, "For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace." What is your mind set on? Is it set on the desires of the flesh and the influence of the world? We need to re-set our minds to the Holy Spirit! The idea of setting our mind on the Spirit is connected to the idea of having an aspiration.² There is an aspiration for your mind to be in agreement with the Holy Spirit, driven by the Holy Spirit, washed and rinsed by the Holy Spirit, radiating the aroma of the Holy Spirit.

Secondly, to gain victory over our thoughts we not only sanitize our thoughts, but we **fortify our thoughts** as well! Here are two ways to fortify your thoughts.

- **Think about God's words:** The psalmist says that blessedness occurs when we delight in and meditate on the "law of the Lord" day and night (Ps 1:2). Proverbs says that we are to keep God's instructions in our hearts (Prov 3:1). We fortify our thoughts when we saturate our minds and our hearts with the word of God. Does this mean we develop complete immunity from toxic thoughts? No, it does not! There are many ways in which the fallout of sin can infect our thinking. On this side of heaven, the battle for our thoughts is ongoing. But we are much better equipped for the fight when our minds and heart are rooted in and steered by the Word.

- **Think about God's works:** The battle for your thoughts is at times exhausting and defeating! How is morale maintained? How is surrender avoided? What will sustain you in the fight? Look at what Psalm 77:12 teaches us. It says, "I will ponder all your work and meditate on your mighty deeds." You are not in this fight alone! God has begun a good work in you and He will see it through until the end (Phil 1:6). The God who is abundant in power (Ps. 147:5), who spoke everything into being (Ps. 33:9), who sent His son Jesus to conquer death (2 Tim. 1:10), to make a way for us to forever enjoy Him free from the blemishes of sin (Jn. 3:16)

is at work in your life. If you want to fortify your thoughts, recount all the wonderful and powerful works of God. Of the many things to dwell on, dwell on His mighty deeds.

Your thoughts are important! Your thoughts matter! It can influence you for good or for bad. It can bring you hope or despair! Don't let anyone convince you otherwise because your thoughts directly impact how you act and how you feel. As a soldier in this cosmic battle, who is called to join God in His kingdom building work, remember the necessity of sanitizing and fortifying your thoughts.

¹J. P. Louw and E. A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, 2nd Ed, Vol 1, (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 593.

²J. A. Witmer, "Romans." *In The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, J.F. Walvoord and R.B. Zuck, ed. Vol 2, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 470.

PRAYER FOR THE WEEK

Lord, give us victory in our minds! We ask that You forgive us for dishonoring You with our thoughts, and give us discernment to distinguish pure thoughts from impure thoughts. We re-dedicate our thoughts to You today. Help us dwell on God-honoring thoughts. Use our thoughts to bring about Your will, Amen!

BIBLE VERSE FOR THE WEEK

"Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable,

if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things."
- Philippians 4:8

DAILY STUDY

DAY 1 (1 Corinthians 2:14-16; Hebrews 9:14; 1 Corinthians 6:20)

As believers in the risen Savior, we have been given the "mind of Christ" (1 Cor. 2:16). This is an undeserving gift from an unobligated giver. Yet, in His love, Christ came to Earth, lived a perfect life, and His atoning blood is purifying our "conscience from dead works" (Heb. 9:14). God is not wasteful with what He gives! We have the mind of Christ for a divine purpose. The purification of our conscious is for a reason! With that said, here are three principles to cling to. 1) God gave us our minds intentionally. 2) They are ours to steward, but ultimately God has ownership (1 Cor. 6:20). 3) Our minds directly impact how we live for God (Heb. 9:14).

- What currently has ownership of your mind?
- What do you need to cut out of your life to "purify" your conscience?
- How is your mind contributing to, or hindering you from, fulfilling God's plan for your life?

DAY 2 (Proverbs 3:5; Isaiah 26:3)

Trusting God helps our minds stay focused on God (Is. 26:3). Trusting God helps us lean not on our own understanding, but on God's infinite wisdom (Prov. 3:5). Trusting God leads to peace (Is. 26:3), trusting God leads

to direction (Prov. 3:6). How blessed we are when we trust in God! So, what does this have to do with thoughts? Easily put, our minds don't always stay focused on God. We all have spiritual ADHD to some degree, chasing after the squirrels of life. Little did I know that my 4th grade teacher who frequently told me to sit down and focus was teaching me, unintentionally, a spiritual discipline. Not only do our minds lose focus on God, but we can convince ourselves that our squirrel chases, the things we shift our focus towards and pursue, are more fruitful than God's path for us. Not setting our minds on God and not leaning on His understanding can rob us of peace and direction!

- What's your greatest fear in fully trusting God? What are you afraid might occur if you fully devote your focus to God? What are you afraid might occur if you quit leaning on your understanding and fully lean on God's wisdom? How did this fear develop and what must be done to overcome it?
- What "understanding" are you leaning on that you think is sturdy, but is actually unstable? Could be a political understanding, could be an inaccurate understanding of God, could be an understanding rooted in a family belief system, could be an understanding stemming from your favorite TV show or celebrity.
- What stories can you reflect on where you have experienced God's peace and direction because of focusing on God and

trusting His plan for your life?

DAY 3 (Jeremiah 4:11-18)

Have you ever had a lodged thought? A thought you can't get rid of? In Jeremiah 4:11-18, God is warning the people of Judah that an enemy from the north is quickly approaching and will soon impoverish them. Yet, Judah refuses to turn to God for help. Smack dab in the middle of this passage, in verse 14, God asks the nation of Judah a critical question: "How long will your wicked thoughts lodge within you?" Some translations use the phrase "harbor wicked thoughts" instead (NIV). Doesn't this paint an accurate picture of what life seems like for us at times? We must stop and ask ourselves, are there any lodged thoughts that I have that are barricading me from experiencing freedom and victory? Perhaps the breakthrough you have been longing for, and pleading to God for, is one dislodged thought away! Perhaps it is time to un-anchor that thought and let it set sail out of the harbor of your mind!

- Why did God attribute Judah's unwillingness to turn to Him to lodged thoughts?
- What thought do you need to dislodge to reclaim victory in your life?

DAY 4 (Romans 14:13; Proverbs 27:17; Galatians 6:2)

Thinking is not just an individual task; it is the responsibility of the community. How we act and speak can influence other's thoughts for better or worse. We can contribute to either freeing or tightening their lodged thoughts

(see day 3). Further, we need community in our life to keep our thought life accountable. We need people speaking truth into our life, feeding us healthy thoughts. Sometimes our thoughts are so troublesome that we need pastoral counseling or even professional help. If so, this is an honorable way to fight the war against your thoughts and much more effective than fighting in isolation.

- Why is Paul's warning to not be a "stumbling block" important and how does this apply to how you impact the thought life of others?
- What can you do this week to improve the thought life of someone else?
- What type of community (small group, reconnecting with friends, pastoral care, etc.) do you need to get involved in to help keep your thought life healthy?

DAY 5 (Luke 2:19; Psalm 143:5; Proverbs 10:28; Romans 8:6)

Our thoughts bring us Joy! Our thoughts bring us peace! Our thoughts bring us a fullness of life! They bring laughter, they bring excitement, they bring eager anticipation. Thoughts are one of God's many good and perfect gifts (James 1:17). It is why we cry at our kid's graduation. It is why we smile when bride and groom say, "I do." It is why we say "awweeee" at the sight of a newborn. Our thoughts allow us to process the joys of this world and they stir in us a deep joy! What greater joy is there to think about than the blessed assurance that we belong to Jesus and that we will spend eternity with Him!

- God has provided us a mind to ponder His Good works (Ps. 13:5). Why does God want us to see and ponder His good works?
- God has given you, like he gave Mary, treasurable moments in life (Lk. 2:19). What are the treasurable moments that bring you joy?

WEEK 3: DISAPPOINTMENT

**Written by Adam Hunter,
Crisis Therapist & Clinical Social Worker**

All of us have expectations of how life should be. We set goals for ourselves and work hard to achieve them, believing that all will work out exactly as we hope.

We soon learn, however, that life doesn't always go according to plan. Sometimes, we encounter unexpected speed bumps. Other times, we find the road we're traveling no longer passable and therefore need to take another route. Or, out of nowhere, we hit a pothole so jarring that it leaves us broken and desolate on the side of life's highway.

During these times of disappointment—of broken dreams—our faith is really tested. Do we believe in the promises of God? Do we reflect on how He has never failed us before—nor has He anyone who has put their trust in Him—and He won't fail us now? Do we choose to hold onto hope when all hope seems lost? Or do we just throw in the towel, believing God has kicked us to the curb?

In the Old Testament, the prophet, Habakkuk, has a “come to Jesus” meeting with, well, Jesus; no pun intended. He watches around him as his countrymen, the Jews, live depravedly and ignore God. He continues to preach to them incessantly and pray that they might turn from their wicked

ways, but to no avail; it's like talking to a brick wall. In frustration, He cries out to God, asking why He isn't fixing things. God responds that He is fully aware and plans to send the Babylonians—a far more wicked group of people than the Jews—to capture them.

Habakkuk is flabbergasted! *“Why in the world would You make a bad problem worse? It'll mean the end of us as a People, and your covenant of blessing will be nothing more than a lie!”* A Billy Graham sermon picks it up from there, which puts things into excellent perspective:

Habakkuk said, “Lord, please tell me what you're doing.” And God said, “No, I'm not going to tell you, Habakkuk. Because if I told you what I was doing, you wouldn't believe it.”

If God today told us what He's doing...we wouldn't believe it.

Don't you think God's given up, and God's abdicated, and God's left the throne. He hasn't.

He's still on the throne. And those of us that know Him, put our trust in Him and Him alone.

I don't put my trust in Washington. I don't put my trust in the United Nations. I don't put my trust in myself. I don't put trust in my money.

I put my trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

When all the rest of it fails and crumbles and shatters, He'll be there.

The rest of the story: God allows Babylon to capture the Jewish people but promises

Habakkuk He will judge the Babylonians for their sins. Eventually, and in His providence, He ends up doing that; the Babylonian Empire falls and the Jews are not annihilated, which further paves the way for Messiah to come and make all things right.

PRAYER FOR THE WEEK

Lord, even if I don't see or feel Your hand, please give me a heart to believe all Your promises. Though it seems my whole world is falling apart, I choose to trust You. By the faith of a mustard seed, You will make a way where there seems to be none; beauty will be made from the ashes. I praise You, God. Amen.

BIBLE VERSE FOR THE WEEK

"Though the fig tree should not blossom,
nor fruit be on the vines,
the produce of the olive fail
and the fields yield no food,
the flock be cut off from the fold
and there be no herd in the stalls,
yet I will rejoice in the Lord;
I will take joy in the God of my salvation.
God, the Lord, is my strength;
he makes my feet like the deer's;
he makes me tread on my high places"
- Habakkuk 3:17-19

DAILY STUDY

DAY 1 (Hebrews 12:5-11)

- How often do we see ourselves as lacking in health, wealth, and happiness while it seems that others "have it made?" (Hello, social media!)
- Is God's abiding Presence in our lives more important than any earthly comforts we may lack? Is it worth suffering, knowing that it makes us more like Christ?

DAY 2 (James 1:2-4)

- Sometimes, these verses are misread. People think that "counting it all joy" expects us to be happy amid our sufferings and disappointments. (Whoopee!) Instead, it means having a *deep, settled peace* or a *calm assurance*. During trials in our lives, do we remain content, knowing that God is growing us to be more like Him? Is the price we pay worth the ultimate Reward? Why or why not?

DAY 3 (Romans 8:28-39)

- This is one of the most well-known Bible passages in which most of us have found comfort. Some, however, only focus on verse 28 and ignore the rest of the text that puts it all into proper context. When the rubber meets the road, and everything around us seems to be falling apart, do we truly believe He's working all things for our good? Do we really understand that nothing will ever separate us from His love? Why or why not?

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WEEK 4:

ANGER

**Written by Brent Shaffer,
Clinical Counselor**

What makes you angry? Many things probably come to mind. The driver that cuts you off, the social media post that differs with your political views, the increasing cost of everything you buy, your kids not listening to you... Lots of things can contribute to feelings of anger. Anger is an emotion that we all experience.

Ephesians 4:26 says, "in your anger do not sin." The Bible is telling us it is ok to be angry but that our anger should not lead to sin. Anger itself is not a sin. Anger is an emotion that we need to control. If we fail to control our anger, our anger controls us. Often people mistake anger with aggression. Aggression can lead to yelling, swearing, hitting, and a host of other behaviors that can hurt others. Aggressive behaviors can lead to sinning.

We can control anger with practice and patience. James 1:19 encourages us to be slow to speak and slow to anger. When we are angry, the reasoning part of our brain does not work well. Controlling our anger also starts with us slowing our brain and thinking before we speak or act. Although not our natural inclination to pause and pray when we are angry, prayer should be our starting point

We also need to ask why we are angry. Why does someone cutting us off when we are driving, a slow checkout line, or that post on social media make us angry? It's understandable that these things annoy us, but they should not consume us with anger. A life filled with anger does not have much room for the peace of God.

When we get angry, we have a choice to make. Are we going to control our anger or is it going to control us? The Holy Spirit can guide us through our feelings of anger. Only He can lead us to take control when we are overwhelmed with anger. Thankfully, God is ready to forgive us for the times that we have not controlled our anger. Today is a new day—the Holy Spirit is here to help us find self-control over our anger.

PRAYER FOR THE WEEK

Heavenly Father, thank You for loving us. Thank You that we can turn to You when we are angry. Forgive us when we lose control of our anger. Help us turn to You in our time of anger and frustration. When we are angry, help us to control it and not sin. Help us be lights to the world by controlling our anger. We ask this all in Jesus' name. Amen.

BIBLE VERSES FOR THE WEEK

"Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger." - James 1:19

"Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger." - Ephesians 4:26

DAILY STUDY

DAY 1 (James 1:19-26)

- Why is it hard to be slow to speak when angry?
- Think about a time you were able to control your anger and a time you weren't. What were the differences? How can you learn from these two events?
- Why is a person's testimony worthless if they can't bridle their tongue?

DAY 2 (Colossians 3:8)

- How can you put away anger?
- Do you see a correlation between anger and the other things listed in this verse?

DAY 3 (Ephesians 4:25-32)

- How can you be angry and not sin?
- When you are angry, how can you control anger so it is still not consuming you when it is time to go to bed?
- How can forgiving others help you be less angry? How can it remind you of what Jesus did for you?

DAY 4 (Galatians 5:16-25)

- Compare the works of the flesh with the works of the Spirit. Pick a fruit of the Spirit to focus on today.
- Are you surprised to find fits of anger on the flesh list? How can the fruit of the Spirit help you not to have anger fits?
- How can you walk with the Spirit throughout your day?

DAY 5 (Matthew 5: 1-12, 5:21-22)

- Compare the Beatitudes with what Jesus said about anger?
- Which Beatitude stands out to you? Why? Spend time focusing on that Beatitude today.

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WEEK 5: FEAR, ANXIETY, AND DEPRESSION

**Written by Jeremy Smith,
Clinical Counselor**

I remember standing in the delivery room of the hospital after my wife had just given birth to our first son and I had cut the umbilical cord. My wife was providing skin-to-skin contact for my son, and the nurses were doing all of the routine tests. This new, cold, loud, and obtrusive world was not what my son wanted and so with his infant lungs, he cried for help. After a few moments, I noticed that I had begun to unconsciously pace because I was worried about him. Eventually I halted. I took a deep breath and tried to figure out how to be of help. A few more cries and again I found myself pacing with fear and concern.

We find anxiety, fear, and depression in a multitude of areas in our lives. Everyone has experienced some of this. It can hit us like a ton of bricks or creep up on us.

- Will we be able to pay the bills?
- Will I ever find a spouse and someone to love me for me?
- Are we raising our children right?
- Am I doing enough for my job?
- Have I disappointed the ones I love the most?

- What will this medical test show?

We can find hope throughout Scripture, but Paul's words in Romans 8 encapsulate this best for me. Paul says the sin-broken world "has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth" (Rom. 8:22) and yet "we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship" (Rom. 8:23). Paul quickly tells us the solution to this pain in Romans 8:26-30. He includes prayers to the Holy Spirit and remembering we are being transformed into the image of Christ. Yet he doesn't stop at just fixing the problems of fear, anxiety, and depression but moves towards resiliency by identifying our sonship in Christ with a few questions to shift our mindset:

If God is for us, who can be against us?...
Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? (Rom. 8: 31, 35).

There is no commitment this will be pain free, quite the opposite. We will put off our old self daily (Eph. 4:22-24), suffer for Christ (Acts 5:41, Rom. 8:17), and need to seek after Christ in all we do (Matt. 6:33). But Paul ends Romans 8 with hope that we will be with God forever in our salvation (Rom. 8:38-39). Matthew Stanford, a Christian and voice in the mental health field, reinforces this. He says, "Whether God chooses to heal us or to supply us with sustaining grace, we can rest in knowing he is sovereign over all things (including demons) and he cares for us."³

We cannot avoid pain due to the fall, but we can find hope and resilience. As a clinical counselor who works with severe mental illness and substance misuse, I help my clients find this peace. While you may not be one of the 58 million U.S. adults with a diagnosable problem,⁴ these steps may still help you.

1. Acknowledge your anxiety, depression, or fear. Identify when it's present and take away the power it has over your thoughts and behaviors.
2. Find ways to manage symptoms through coping skills, peer support, and going to God for healing. We have a Wonderful Counselor who can bring healing and is always there to listen.
3. Find the root of the problem that leads to the symptoms. You may need to change your pace of life, confront your past, or cut off toxic relationships. For those who struggle significantly, you may want to talk to a pastor or clinical counselor.
4. Finally, look at how these problems can be used for God's glory (or as counselors would say, reframe the situation to the positive). This will build hope and resilience so anxiety, depression, and fear will have a harder time disrupting your life in the future.

Unwanted emotional problems do not have to rule our lives. Instead, they can be used for good. Lysa TerKeurst's words ring true:

God doesn't want you or me to suffer. But He will allow it in doses to increase our trust.

Our pain and suffering isn't to hurt us. It's to save us. To save us from a life where we are self-reliant, self-satisfied, self-absorbed, and set up for the greatest pain of all... separation from God.

It is my prayer you may be able to find peace. But until that day comes, seek out the Lord for hope and healing in all that you do. Know that you are a witness, just as Job was when he lost everything. Have faith, even as Jonah did when he was in the belly of the whale and do not forget about God's providence when God sends you out to share your story. And know that our treasures are not of this world, but of the one to come (Matt. 6:19-21).

³Matthew S. Stanford, *Grace for the Afflicted: A Clinical and Biblical Perspective on Mental Illness* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2017) 32.

⁴"Mental Health Information." National Institute of Mental Health. Accessed <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/mental-illness> on March 23, 2023.

⁵Lysa TerKeurst, *It's Not Supposed to Be This Way: Finding Unexpected Strength When Disappointments Leave You Shattered* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2018) 45.

PRAYER FOR THE WEEK

God, we bring our pain to You that we go through now, knowing that You have the power to heal in miraculous ways, yet knowing that if You choose not to, that there is a reason. We ask for peace and hope in our daily walk with You, to surround us with Christian supports, and seek some relief. And we ask that You remind us to seek out others in community where we can provide that to them in moments when we have found hope and strength in You. In Jesus' name. Amen.

BIBLE VERSE FOR THE WEEK

"... casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you." - 1 Peter 5:7

DAY 1 - ANXIETY (Romans 8:1-8; Deuteronomy 31:1-8, Proverbs 12:25, Matthew 6:25-34, Luke 12:22-34, Philippians 4:4-7, 1 Peter 5:7)

- If we are to understand that in our salvation we have no condemnation and any worries we can pray to God to intercede, why do we find ourselves regularly trying to take care of it ourselves or predict what will happen? We certainly are tasked to be strong and courageous as Moses tells the Israelites, but it is a fine line between planning for the future alongside working hard fulfill these plans and simply worrying and fretting about what is to come.
- In Matthew 6, Jesus is addressing anxiety specifically when it disconnects us from our relationship with God because of our lack of trusting in Him. What is one or two daily reminders you can put into your life today to not only remind yourself of that trust, but to rely on it?

DAY 2 - FEAR (Romans 8:9-17; Psalm 27:1, Psalm 118:5-6, Proverbs 14:26-27; Isaiah 41:8-10, Matthew 10:26-31, Hebrews 4:14-16)

- King David is the author of many Psalms that have emotions of fear, shame, and regret running through them, yet in the midst of all of that he was seeking after God. Further, Jesus' words say that we should not fear earthly things. What have you allowed to fester fear in your life? What can you do to take the power back from this fear?

- Remember that we are children of the Most High and descendants of Abraham. That requires a lot from us, but also there is much to be given. How can you move your attention from earthly fears to a Kingdom mindset? If you struggle with this question, who can you bring to support you? (reconnecting with friends, pastoral care, etc.) do you need to get involved in to help keep your thought life healthy?

DAY 3 - DEPRESSION (Romans 8:18-25; Psalm 18:1-19, Psalm 40:1-17, Matthew 11:28-30, 2 Corinthians 4:7-12)

- In counseling, we have a saying: "Pain is inevitable, suffering is a choice." It's ironic because Jesus' suffering on the Cross was the ultimate choice so our sins could be forgiven, but are we continuing to choose suffering instead of giving it up? Jesus' yoke is easy and burden is light.
- Jesus is our rock, our fortress, and shield. He blesses us, entrusts us, gives us rest, and delights in us as Christians. So, what is holding you back from accepting this gift today and the next day? How can you change that mindset and things in your life to live this out?

DAY 4 - HOPE (Romans 8:26-30; Psalm 34:15-18, Joshua 1:1-9, Matthew 5:1-12, John 16:32-33, 2 Corinthians 1:3-7, 2 Corinthians 4:13-18)

- Joshua's leadership, David's heart after God, Nehemiah's ambition, and Paul's humble faithfulness are things I want to mimic. Nobody got it right, but that might be why Jesus describes our treasures in jars of clay. What change, internally or in view of others,

could we make to show that Jesus lives within us and we are alive because of His sacrifice?

- The Beatitudes may be my single favorite Scripture that is outside of Jesus' acts of salvation. His blessings for us, specifically those who rely on Him are what cause me to not seek things of this earth. How do your characteristics line up with these depictions Jesus shares for hope for the world?

DAY 5 - RESILIENCY (Romans 8:31-39; Proverbs 3:1-6, Proverbs 17:17, Romans 12:1-16, Galatians 6:1-10, James 1:2-4, 1 Peter 5:8-11)

- Many of these verses depict not just one person building resiliency, but a community of Christians overcoming adversity. Do not go it alone. Do you have someone you can go to share your anxiety, depression, or fear? Do you have people in your life that will check in on you and call you out if you don't share?
- Resiliency is not about being safe. It will leave scars, but if we can put our trust and faith in the Lord, we will be stronger for it. But it requires you to put yourself out there to lead a small group, go on a mission's trip, increase your tithing, or evangelize to your community. Where is God leading you to do more and what is your next step?

WEEK 6: SHAME

Written by Josh Kocher,
Young Adults Pastor

"Shame on you!" "You should be ashamed of yourself!" You have probably heard these phrases, or even used them, throughout your life. Shame is a powerful emotion, one that can be used for good, but usually brings isolation, depression, self-harm, and bondage. Typically, like the phrases above, shame is meant to be a motivator to change behavior. Both in our culture and in the ancient world, public and interpersonal shame guided one's decision-making process. It would have been humiliating and shameful for you to be removed from a seat of honor at a party and it given to someone else (Lk. 14:9). For us, we can feel shame if it becomes public knowledge we can't provide for our family, we have an unexpected pregnancy, you aren't keeping up with your friends in career, marriage, family, etc.

But shame as we often understand it, is destructive, especially as believers. While in its context was meant to motivate action, the shame we deal with is internal and focuses on the worth of our self. A feeling of shame usually sounds like, "I *am* bad" or "I *am* worthless." This is opposed to guilt, which says, "I *have done something* bad or worthless." See the difference? One focuses on your actions, the other focuses on your self-worth. The former has no place in the

believer's life, the latter should lead us to repentance and growth. Most who struggle with this kind of shame assume others and God himself see them through the same lens: worthless and hopeless.

What are we missing when we live lives filled with shame? We are usually struggling with one or more of the following:

1) Knowledge. A believer wrapped up in feelings of worthlessness based on their situation in life or ongoing actions might not know what the Scriptures actually say about them. For instance, Romans 8:1 says that there is "no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus." That even in our battle with the sinfulness within us, we are no longer condemned by God. So, we have no reason to condemn ourselves! Later in that passage, Paul asks rhetorical questions to the readers, "Who will bring a charge against God's elect?" and "Who can condemn [us]?" The expected response is *no one*! Why? Because it's *God* who justified us (Rom. 8:33) and *Jesus* who intercedes for us (Rom. 8:34). Not even a believer has the right to condemn themselves because God is the one who has worked out our salvation. We can also forget that Jesus became the curse of the law we deserved (Gal. 3:13-14) and experienced and bore the shame we were due (Matt. 27:28-31; Lk. 18:32). Lastly, we as believers might not fully know the forgiveness we've received. John says that "if we confess our sins, *He* is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 Jn. 1:9). To be forgiven is to be restored to a relationship with God that cannot be severed! There is a

difference between losing fellowship with God (because He's disciplining us; Heb. 12:5-11) and losing our relationship with God. Shame tells us that we've lost relationship with God, the Bible says that we're only experiencing discipline in order to grow us in Christlikeness.

If knowledge isn't the issue, then **2) Belief** is! We can know God's word and his promises, but it's another to believe them. To hold to them as true and applying to us. Especially, when we're feeling shame. We can tell ourselves that God's word applies to other people. They have forgiveness, God's love, and hope, but not us. In these times, we must humble ourselves and receive the truth of God's promises for his children. A prayer in this time that is helpful is, Lord, "I believe, help my unbelief" (Mark 9:24).

And lastly, **3) Community**. We are either isolating ourselves from others because of the shame or have relationships that drive us deeper into despair. Shame can (and should) be used within our relationships in a healthy, corrective way. However, those experiencing shame may believe their community will reject them, leading to more anguish. Rather, we need to be a community and trust the people in our lives to encourage us in the truth of the Gospel and provide healthy correction when we need it. Unhealthy shame diminishes the relationship, while healthy shame strengthens the relationship. Someone who loves you will remind you that you are loved, forgiven, and cleansed by the blood of Jesus, but also show you that your actions

or choices were not reflecting your identity in Jesus or the newness of life He has given us.

As we journey through this life, may we remember what Jesus has done, despising the shame, bearing the guilt, and taking on the full measure of punishment we deserved. May we be filled with knowledge, belief, and surrounded by a community that will build us up and lead us to Jesus in the midst of our feelings of shame.

PRAYER FOR THE WEEK

Father, we thank and praise You for Your gift of salvation. Thank You that You are redeeming us physically, spiritually, and emotionally. By the power of Your Spirit, lead me deeper in the knowledge of Your truth, belief in Your Word and promises, and community to grow in the image of Jesus. Please remove the shame I experience and fill me with peace, joy, and wonder at Your deep love and compassion towards me. In Jesus' name, Amen.

BIBLE VERSE FOR THE WEEK

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

- Isaiah 53:4-5

DAILY STUDY

DAY 1 (1 John 1:5-10)

- What does John say the effects of Jesus' blood and the faithfulness of God produce?
- What is forgiveness? How does God's forgiveness work? How is shame and forgiveness related? When you experience shame, do you feel forgiven?

DAY 2 (Romans 8:1-2; Romans 8:31-39)

- What does Paul say about our status with God in these passages? How does condemnation and shame relate to one another?
- When feeling shame, we can feel unlovable. How would Paul respond to you or someone feeling ashamed (based on Romans 8:31-39)?
- Why do you think it is so hard to believe God's Word when we're dealing with shame? How can you push through that and trust him?

DAY 3 (Hebrews 12:1-2)

- In this passage, the author highlights that Jesus despised the shame of the cross. He was not deterred by the humiliation He experienced and how everyone rejected Him. The other side of shame is public. We normally speak of internal shame, but as believers, we also will experience opportunities for public shame. It says in Hebrews 12:2 that He "despised the shame of the cross." What does that mean? How was He "shamed" during His crucifixion? (See Matt. 27:28-31)

- Culture will want us to conform to their standards and beliefs, not Christ's. Have you been shamed or humiliated for your faith? If not, are you afraid to be bold about your love for God? How can you "despise the shame" as Jesus and follow in his footsteps?

DAY 4 (Isaiah 54:1-10)

- This passage highlights the future that we get to look forward to! What is promised to us regarding shame in this passage? Which aspects of God's character are on display when He brings our salvation to completion? (Is. 54:7, 8, 10).
- When you experience shame, are you prone to forget God's character described in this passage? How can you remind yourself of His love, compassion, grace, and mercy in the midst of shame?

DAY 5 (2 Corinthians 5:17-21)

- What does Paul say about believers in 2 Cor. 5:17 and 21? How does this truth fit with our feelings of shame? If we're struggling to believe the truths of verse 17 and 21, how can verses 18-20 be an encouragement (Who, or what made the truths of v. 17 and 21 possible)?
- What in these verses is difficult to believe when you're experiencing shame? How do you think God would encourage you the next time you experience feelings of guilt and shame?



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