



UPPER ROOM
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Matthew 28:19-20, 2 Timothy 2:2

Flesh Patterns and Coping Mechanisms

Flesh refers to the old ways or patterns by which you have attempted to get all your needs supplied instead of seeking Christ first and trusting Him to meet your needs. These patterns develop as you are growing up in your parent's home.¹

— Bill Gillham

Overview

We arrived into this world with an empty canvas. Growing up, we have various experiences, good, bad, and in between. It is not the experiences themselves, but the interpretations we internalized which shape our belief system. From day one, parents, siblings, relatives, friends, teachers, coaches, and others, painted on our canvas by whatever they taught us, things they said to us in love or in anger, and by the behavior good or bad they modeled in front of us. By age of seven about 85% of our canvas is covered with various lines, wide, narrow, and in between, and various pictures, in color or black and white. **For the rest of our lives, we carry this canvas with us.**

The wide lines form a strong grid, called *core beliefs*². Not all core beliefs are bad or inaccurate; it is a mixture of lie-based beliefs, truth-based beliefs, and in between. It seems that we are eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil all over again. The core beliefs are the very center of how we see ourselves, the world, God, other people, and the future. **Our core beliefs form the lens through which we interpret life, make decisions, and base our self-esteem.**

Later on in life, we hear the gospel, and the Holy Spirit convicts us that we are sinners and arouses in us the need for a Savior. By faith (Romans 10:8–10), we accept Jesus as our personal Savior and Lord; we are born again, and we become “a new creation” (2 Corinthians 5:17). However, God does not send any archangel to “erase” our canvas. We come into God’s family with our “grid” the way it has been painted on our canvas from day one until we met Jesus (and even after). From that point on, until we meet Jesus face-to-face, we enter into the process called **progressive sanctification** (1 Thessalonians 5:23–24). The living Word of God and the Holy Spirit, with our full cooperation, are diligently working to renew our minds—*metanoia*³ (Romans 12:2), and transform our character—*metamorphosis*⁴ (2 Corinthians 3:18). **This is a life-long process.** If we cooperate with the Holy Spirit, God is committed to use every life experience: school, family, work, successes, failures, sickness, and so on, *to help us become conformed to the image of His Son* (Romans 8:28–30). The Lord can use our entire spectrum of negative emotions: *anger, depression,*

confusion, helplessness, indifference, fear, hurt, sadness, and so on, to expose the fleshly patterns buried deep down inside of us. These lie-based beliefs are like scales over our eyes preventing us from seeing and experiencing God's truth and His love. They have an irresistible pull in our lives to live independently of God. In time, as we position ourselves to receiving God's transformative truth, these lie-based beliefs, upon exposure, are irradiated by God's Light—Jesus (Ephesians 5:13). All of a sudden, the lie-based beliefs, one by one, lose their influence on us. The revealed truth of God's Word shines over our canvas (Ephesians 5:14, 2 Corinthians 4:3–6), and the wide lie-based lines, one by one, are erased and replaced with strong truth-based lines. Praise God! And the process continues. Now, in all the transformed areas, we can *serve* God and others *in newness of the Spirit* (Romans 7:6). In a sense this is the way we are supposed to *crucify* (Strong #G4717 **σταυρόω**)⁵ the flesh, so we can walk according to our core identity—*dead to sin and alive to God* (Romans 6:11).

This process is not our attempt to improve ourselves, or a new positive psychology technique. This is a spiritual process based on our cooperation with the Word of God and the Holy Spirit, through which our fleshly patterns, (lie-based beliefs, and coping mechanisms), are identified and exposed so we can bring them to the cross to be crucified (Gr. **σταυρόω**), that the truth may come in and shine in our hearts. This is the power of the Gospel: “For God, who said, “Light shall shine out of darkness,” is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:6).

May I ask you a simple question? When you squeeze something: a fruit, or a toothpaste tube, what comes out? Of course, the answer is that under pressure *what is inside it comes out*. Similarly, when we are under pressure, we manifest what is inside of us, the deeds of the flesh or the fruit of the Spirit.

In the process of progressive sanctification, God—the Vinedresser (John 15:1), orchestrates all sorts of situations that apply pressure on us, squeezing us. The squeezing is not meant to hurt us, ruin our life, or make us miserable, though, many times this is exactly how it feels. God's purpose in using various forms of pain is to help us realize what is inside us so we can see clearly the real source and motivation in our life: **the flesh** or **the Spirit**.

As these flesh patterns, false beliefs, and coping mechanisms are exposed we are in a much better position to agree and cooperate with the Holy Spirit in the process of mind-renewal resulting in spiritual transformation. **The result of the entire process is true sanctification**. Paul explains clearly: “I am speaking in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, resulting in further lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification” (Romans 6:19).

One by one, flesh pattern by flesh pattern, lie-based belief by lie-based belief, one wrong motive at a time after another, is brought to the light. When these things are not hidden anymore, and being exposed by Christ's powerful transformative Light and Truth, their influence over us is broken. (See Ephesians 5:8, 11, 13).

I am so proud of you! Now you are ready to take the self-assessment. Begin the assessment process with prayer:

“Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts;
And see if there be any hurtful way in me, And lead me in the everlasting way.
(Psalm 139:23–24)

Proceed in a posture of meditation being open to the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

Flesh Patterns Self-Assessment Tool
(Adapted from the *GraceLife Conference* manual)

Read each statement carefully. **Check all the words or phrases that apply to you.**

1. When I am under pressure, to cope when things aren't going right or going my way, I tend to become self-absorbed (self-consumed) by:

- becoming overly introspective
- getting depressed by stuffing my anger and frustrations
- playing the role of a victim/martyr
- feeling sorry for myself
- beating up on myself (hating myself)
- engaging in self-pity
- focusing on my suffering and trials to get attention and sympathy

2. When I am under pressure, to cope when things aren't going right or going my way, I tend to withdraw (isolate myself) by:

- becoming aloof (pulling away)
- distancing myself from others
- being overly introverted
- going into a shell
- avoiding others (becoming a loner)
- retreating to the silent treatment
- running and hiding (escaping)
- becoming unapproachable
- not communicating

3. When I am under pressure, to cope when things aren't going right or going my way, I tend to become obsessed with:

- accomplishments
- how I look
- the past (especially past hurts and past failures)
- recognition
- what others think of me
- devotion to a cause
- status
- my physical health
- structure, order, rules, and regulations

4. When I am under pressure, to cope when things aren't going right or going my way, I tend to escape pain/pressure through:

- carousing
- television
- computers
- overeating
- school
- reading
- religious activity and service
- drugs/alcohol
- athletics
- pornography
- sex
- sleep
- fantasy
- becoming a workaholic, work/career/business/job
- staying busy
- hobbies/games
- entertainment
- talking
- religion
- movies
- gloom & doom thinking (refusing to see the positive)

5. When I am under pressure, to cope when things aren't going right or going my way, I tend to become self-disciplined (self-reliant) by:

- becoming a perfectionist
- living "by the book"
- setting unrealistic standards for myself and others
- overcompensating by trying even harder so as not to fail
- living by rules (have to's, should's, must's, ought's)
- basing acceptance (of self and others) on performance
- becoming legalistic
- becoming too hard and strict on myself and others
- fearing making mistakes

6. When I am under pressure, to cope when things aren't going right or going my way, I tend to become self-indulgent (self-gratifying) by:

- becoming impulsive (hasty)
- becoming compulsive (lacking self-control)
- buying things to feel better
- lusting (craving) for alcohol, drugs, caffeine, sugar, cigarettes, sex, junk food
- assuming "if it feels good do it"

7. When I am under pressure, to cope when things aren't going right or going my way, I tend to become anxious (worry and fret) by:

- becoming fearful (apprehensive)
- becoming paranoid (overly suspicious)
- lacking peace and rest
- seeking astrology, horoscopes, fortune telling, (tarot cards, palm reading, Ouija boards, and so on)
- becoming paralyzed (going numb)
- seeking the occult for guidance and strength

8. When I am under pressure, to cope when things aren't going right or going my way, I become dominant by:

- becoming dictatorial (bossy)
- becoming manipulative
- becoming demanding (pushy)
- intimidating others
- becoming overbearing (controlling)=
- demanding my rights

9. When I am under pressure, to cope when things aren't going right or going my way, try to stay control thorough:

- blackmailing (making threats)
- manipulating (using coercion)
- using profanity (swearing)

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- giving the silent treatment
- being passive (playing helpless)
- not eating (anorexia/bulimia)
- using guilt
- showing favoritism

10. When I am under pressure, to cope when things aren't going right or going my way, I tend to come across as insensitive by being:

- uncaring
- indifferent
- unconcerned and/or unsympathetic

11. When I am under pressure, to cope when things aren't going right or going my way, I tend to become complacent (nonchalant) by saying things like:

- “It doesn't matter...”
- “it's okay”
- “whatever”

12. When I am under pressure, to cope when things aren't going right or going my way, I tend to challenge others by:

- resisting authority
- becoming uncooperative (unteachable)
- causing dissension (strife)
- irritating (aggravating) others
- becoming argumentative rigid, inflexible, closed-minded
- becoming stubborn, obstinate, unreasonable or unyielding

13. When I am under pressure, to cope when things aren't going right or going my way, I tend to become pessimistic by:

- lacking confidence and optimism
- becoming skeptical (suspicious)
- distrusting others, myself, God, church, and/or government
- expecting the worst in others
- assuming the worst-case scenario to protect myself from disappointment and pain
- seldom being pleased with self/others
- becoming jealous of others' success and happiness

14. When I am under pressure, to cope when things aren't going right or going my way, I tend to develop a critical attitude by:

- finding fault with others or myself and everything around me
- nit-picking things to death
- becoming judgmental (opinionated)
- becoming prejudiced (intolerant)
- complaining a lot (becoming negative)

15. When I am under pressure, to cope when things aren't going right or going my way, I tend to become hostile (vent my anger) by:

- becoming unfriendly (cynical)
- becoming hateful (malicious)
- becoming harsh (cruel and brutal)
- becoming sarcastic (caustic)
- having a quick temper

16. When I am under pressure, to cope when things aren't going right or going my way, I tend to become self-assured (self-confident) by:

- depending on myself instead of God
- becoming proud (haughty)
- becoming egocentric (acting pompous)
- bragging (being boastful)
- becoming arrogant (cocky)
- having a superior attitude:
- saying in effect: – I must always be right
- saying in effect: – I must always win
- saying in effect: – I must always be the best
- pretending that I know it all
- becoming conceited (smug)
- having difficulty asking for help

17. When I am under pressure, to cope when things aren't going right or going my way, I tend to become self-righteous (self-justifying) by:

- becoming defensive
- making excuses (rationalizing)
- covering up and hiding mistakes
- assuming I am never the problem
- pointing to someone or something else as the problem
- avoiding taking responsibility for failure or problems
- becoming critical of others (blaming others)
- having difficulty admitting I was wrong or apologizing
- having difficulty asking for forgiveness or expressing gratitude

18. When I am under pressure, to cope when things aren't going right or going my way, I tend to become tense (nervous and agitated) by:

- finding it hard to relax
- becoming restless (high-strung)
- becoming impatient

19. When I am under pressure, to cope when things aren't going right or going my way, I tend to become emotionally insulated by:

- keeping people at a distance
- becoming inhibited (bottling up emotions)
- avoiding intimacy
- denying feelings
- having difficulty expressing feelings and opinions openly and honestly
- becoming unable to express love in a meaningful way

20. When I am under pressure, to cope when things aren't going right or going my way, I tend to deny reality by:

- ignoring problems and hoping they will go away
- deceiving others and myself
- conning people to get what I want
- denying anything is bad or wrong
- exaggerating (overstating matters)
- lying (misleading)
- playing games to hide real intent

21. When I am under pressure, to cope when things aren't going right or going my way, I tend to hold a grudge (be resentful) by:

- becoming moody (sulky)
- trying to get even (seeking revenge)
- becoming unforgiving and harboring bitterness
- wanting others to fail or get hurt
- keeping a scorecard of wrongs done to me or by me
- punishing myself or others

22. When I am under pressure, to cope when things aren't going right or going my way, I tend to fight unfairly (take cheap shots) by:

- becoming slanderous (misrepresenting the actual situation)
- refusing to communicate
- gossiping (talking behind other people's backs)
- becoming passive and forgetting things
- engaging in passive-aggressive behavior (that is, using humor to hide real feelings, becoming sarcastic)
- procrastinating and being late

23. When I am under pressure, to cope when things aren't going right or going my way, I tend to put up a front (not being real) by:

- faking it (hiding what I really think and feel)
- becoming superficial (plastic)
- putting on a show (performing) to get attention and impress others
- becoming gushy (too sentimental)
- becoming pretentious (phony unreal)

24. When I am under pressure, to cope when things aren't going right or going my way, I tend to:

- lack compassion and kindness
- lack understanding
- lack gentleness and love

25. When I am under pressure, to cope when things aren't going right or going my way, I tend to live by my feelings by:

- becoming too subjective (believing that truth is only what I feel)
- believing I'm okay only when I feel okay
- becoming too sensitive to criticism
- becoming hypersensitive
- taking things too personally
- reading in rejection when it isn't there
- setting things up to bring about rejections
- becoming touchy (irritable)
- being controlled by emotions, anger, doubts, fear, and so on

26. When I am under pressure, to cope when things aren't going right or going my way, I tend to become a pleaser (being nice) by:

- trying to be all things to all people
- trying to do the "proper or correct" thing
- trying to keep everyone happy
- trying to keep peace at all cost
- avoiding conflict at all cost
- becoming a doormat (letting others take advantage of me)
- expressing to others what I think they want to hear
- giving in to others too easily
- becoming controlled by others
- having difficulty saying no, setting boundaries, standing up for myself
- becoming overly compliant
- becoming too submissive

27. When I am under pressure, to cope when things aren't going right or going my way, I tend to become passive (lacking initiative) by:

- quitting too easily (giving up)
- not taking chances
- playing it safe (pulling back and waiting)
- waiting for someone to tell me what to do and how to think
- depending on others instead of God
- vacillating (becoming too changeable)
- becoming indecisive (not making decisions)
- wanting someone else to make the decision for me
- avoiding failure at all cost
- procrastinating (putting things off)
- becoming irresponsible (becoming unreliable)
- becoming lazy, apathetic, and lethargic

28. When I am under pressure, to cope when things aren't going right or going my way, I tend to become self-depreciating (self-condemning; self critical) by:

- assuming I am always the problem
- becoming overly apologetic
- becoming too hard on myself

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- having difficulty: receiving love, receiving compliments, receiving forgiveness, and forgiving myself
- clinging (becoming a leech) to those who finally accept me
- becoming uncomfortable with success

29. When I am under pressure, to cope when things aren't going right or going my way, I tend to become a caretaker (rescuer) by:

- becoming over-protective
- taking responsibility for other people's feelings (becoming overly responsible)
- making decisions for others
- giving unsolicited advice
- trying to prevent other people's failure
- becoming possessive (selfish)
- becoming a busybody (becoming too involved in other people's affairs)
- becoming preachy (lecturing others)
- trying to find someone who needs me and who I can rescue
- nagging (badgering)
- talking too much
- listening poorly

30. When I am under pressure, to cope when things aren't going right or going my way, I tend to become too intense (overly serious) by:

- becoming stoical (unemotional)
- having trouble dealing with feelings
- becoming overly analytical
- becoming stern (solemn/formal)
- lacking joy or life
- not being fun to be with

Congratulations! You did yourself a great service!

Now that you completed your self-assessment, please read out loud only the questions and the phrases that apply to you. Does it sound right to you? If yes: **This is your particular flesh.**

In a nutshell these are your coping mechanisms, your main flesh patterns. Every time you catch yourself behaving out these patterns, pray out loud (if possible):

This is my flesh acting out. This is not what my new man or new nature is all about. I am not under any obligation to live according to these flesh patterns. Father God, please empower me through the Holy Spirit right now to put to death the deeds of my body. Lord, I am alive in Christ, and I surrender myself to You wholly. Father, I am presenting my members as slaves to righteousness. I allow the Holy Spirit to guide my walk into the newness of life. I pray in my Savior's name, amen.

“But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh” (Galatians 5:16)

With love in the service of Christ,

Valy Vaduva

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Endnotes:

¹ Bill Gillham, *Lifetime Guarantee*, (Harvest House Publishers, Eugene, OR, 1993), 16.

² Rhena Branch, Rob Willson, *Core Beliefs and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy*, “Your core beliefs are ideas or philosophies that you hold very strongly and very deeply. These ideas are usually developed in childhood or early in adult life.” Accessed on July 23, 2021. <https://www.dummies.com/health/mental-health/core-beliefs-and-cognitive-behavioural-therapy/>.

³ Metanoia: change of mind, repentance. Original Word: **μετάνοια**. Strong #G3341. Short Definition: repentance, a change of mind, change in the inner man. Accessed on October 12, 2016, <http://biblehub.com/greek/3341.htm>.

⁴ Metamorphosis: “1: (a) Change of physical form, structure, or substance, especially by supernatural means. (b) A striking alteration in appearance, character, or circumstances.” www.merriam-webster.com. Accessed on July 23, 2021. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/metamorphosis>.

⁵ Stauroo, Strong #G4717, verb: to crucify, to crucify one, metaphorically: to crucify the flesh, destroy its power utterly (the nature of the figure implying that the destruction is attended with intense pain). Accessed on July 23, 2021. <https://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/nas/stauroo.html>.