

Top 5 Heart Issues
(Anger, Anxiety, Depression, Drunkenness, Suicidal Thoughts)

Here are a few excerpts from an upcoming book that the team has put together.

Dr. O

ANGER

An intense emotional response characterized by displeasure and antagonism, typically aroused by a perceived wrong or offense. While the Bible acknowledges the legitimacy of God's just anger towards sin, it also cautions believers against uncontrolled or prolonged human anger, advising instead for self-restraint and reflection. The Bible further exhorts followers to pursue peace, forgiveness, and understanding in the face of conflict.

Be angry and do not sin. Don't let the sun go down on your anger, and don't give the devil an opportunity. Ephesians 4:26-27

Anger is a powerful emotion that impacts our lives but doesn't have to control us. Paul's passage offers wisdom for those who struggle with anger by acknowledging its presence while pointing out the importance of how we handle it. The verse lets us know that feeling angry is not necessarily wrong. But it does caution us against acting out in anger. This distinction allows us to recognize our emotions are real, but it does not have to dictate our actions. The advice to address and resolve anger before the end of the day suggests a wise approach we should follow. It encourages believers to confront and resolve whatever issues that may be causing us to be angry instead of letting them linger and worsen over time.

My dear brothers and sisters, understand this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger, for human anger does not accomplish God's righteousness. James 1:19-20

The emotion of anger, which is sinful when rooted in pride, is used to manipulate others. If in pride, a person "wants what they want when they want it" (pride), they will use anger to try and get others to give them what they want in exchange for peace in the relationship. This passage from James illustrates the emptiness of these efforts, for God never uses sinful human anger to accomplish His purposes. This text also provides a remedy, for those in Christ can listen and speak carefully as they yield to the control of God's Spirit. In this way, they can respond in Christlike ways. When we allow ourselves to get angry and rage, we allow the devil to have a foothold on us (Eph. 4:27). We allow him to manipulate us and keep us in a downward spiral. The devil wants us to overact and get angry because, just like it says in James, when we get angry, we cannot produce righteous anger. Therefore, we must leave judgment and anger up to God. Everyone must stand before God and answer for the sins they have committed, so we need to leave the judgment up to Him.

A gentle answer turns away anger, but a harsh word stirs up wrath. The tongue of the wise makes knowledge attractive, but the mouth of fools blurts out foolishness. The eyes of the Lord are everywhere, observing the wicked and the good. Proverbs 15:1-3

Dealing with anger can be a challenge for individuals. This verse guides anyone facing anger, highlighting the importance of using words and acknowledging that God sees it all. The passage teaches us that responding calmly and peacefully in anger can defuse tension. It emphasizes our choices regarding our reactions, either responding gently or resorting to words, each with its consequences. Reminding those we counsel that God is aware of everything happening adds a sense of accountability. It encourages self-control, wisdom, and making decisions that reflect integrity. Ultimately, this passage offers advice on managing conflicts between people while providing a perspective on living following biblical principles. The verses above present a strategy for diffusing anger and setting us up for a life of wisdom and understanding. What we view as essential, and primary may not line up with Scripture. The feelings of rage typically stem from a selfishness or pride-filled motive that moves away from what God says is reasonable and necessary. The difficulty is looking past our anger when we are enraged, but Scripture

teaches that if we slow down our thoughts and listen, we can handle situations skillfully without causing physical or emotional harm.

A person's insight gives him patience, and his virtue is to overlook an offense. A king's rage is like the roaring of a lion, but his favor is like dew on the grass. Proverbs 19:11-12

This proverb offers insights for those struggling with anger by highlighting the importance of patience and letting go of offenses. It emphasizes that wisdom and understanding can help us exercise self-restraint and choose not to react to every slight or offense, demonstrating strength through composure. The passage also suggests that uncontrolled anger, like a lion's roar, can have an impact comparable to a king's terrifying wrath. By embracing this truth, individuals can cultivate a mindset that prioritizes forgiveness and self-control over seeking retaliation. These verses remind us that mastering our anger leads to honor and respect in relationships and society. This approach encourages us to respond calmly despite provocation, guiding us to manage anger effectively.

Practical Advice + Homework

Confess Sin: Pride lies behind the sin of unrighteous anger, and you must recognize that truth as you humbly confess this sin. Knowing that God is faithful to forgive and cleanse your heart following this confession encourages this humble and obedient action. (Homework: Stop right now and confess the sin of pride and its accompanying anger to God and to anyone you have wronged in your anger).

Renew Your Mind Through Scripture: Understanding anger from God's perspective is critical to the change process. (Homework: Read the following biblical text to understand God's call to give up sinful anger: Ephesians 4:22-27 and 31-32. Answer these questions from the biblical text you just read: What did you learn about God's view of anger? What did you learn about what you should do when you are angry? How do your thinking, feelings, and actions need to change considering these truths?)

Obey God: Respond with the fruit of the Spirit rather than fleshly anger. (Homework: Spend time with God in His Word each day, attend worship at your church each week, ask others to hold you accountable when you respond in anger, and humbly accept their correction (Matthew 18:15).

Timely Resolution: Don't let anger fester. It is like an acid eating away at you from the inside out; seek resolution or find ways to calm yourself before the day ends. This echoes the scriptural admonition in Ephesians 4:26 not to let the sun go down on one's anger, emphasizing prompt reconciliation. (Homework: At the end of each day, reflect on any moments of anger and actively release them through prayer or other methods to eliminate pent-up anger. Some possible activities: gym, meditate, go for a walk, do an art project, etc.)

Identify Your Anger: We need to identify places where anger takes over and then set boundaries to help us avoid anger. While setting these boundaries, pray through these areas and ask God to come into these places in your lives. (Homework: Reflect and figure out a place in your life where anger takes over. Spend time on your knees, confess to God these areas, and ask Him to come into these places.)

Practice Active Listening: Before reacting in anger, take the time to listen and understand the other person's perspective. (Homework: The next time you disagree, count to ten before responding, focusing on understanding the other person's view. If you want to immediately respond via text message or email, write what you want to say in the note section of your phone, wait 30 minutes, and reconsider what you want to send.)

Cut It Out: In moments of anger, stop whatever you are doing and leave, if possible, that situation, such as stop watching sports, stop playing video games, or stop reading social media or news articles. The problem with hanging around things that trigger your anger is that your anger will not suddenly go away. In terms of watching sports, keep up with alerts on your phone or check the score tomorrow. In terms of playing video games, practice self-control by finding something else to do when you feel angry, like reading, going outside for a short time, or something else that does not involve screens. Regarding social media and news articles, take a break from those for a day and stay away from screens if possible. (Homework: Memorize James 1:19-20 and write or type it out whenever you get angry. Doing this will not only help you memorize the passage, but it will train your mind to think of it when you do get angry. Instead of making bad habits out of anger, create helpful habits that reinforce biblical principles daily. You will find that this will bring freedom and help you realize that your emotions do not control you, but you can control your reactions when your emotions swell inside you.)

Choose Words Wisely: Words can escalate or defuse situations; strive for gentleness and clarity in your speech. This reflects the wisdom in Proverbs 15:1, where a gentle answer can turn away wrath. (Homework: Journal about recent arguments and how different words might have led to a different outcome. Really be intentional about being quick to listen and slow to speak.)

Discussion Starters:

1. **Differentiating Righteous and Unrighteous Anger:** Ephesians 4:26-27 reminds us that anger in and of itself isn't sinful; it's how we handle the emotion that can be sinful. How can we identify when our anger aligns with God's justice versus when it stems from our own selfish desires or misunderstandings? What biblical accounts or stories highlight the difference between righteous and unrighteous anger?
2. **The Power of Words and Responses:** Proverbs 15:1 and James 1:19-20 provide insights into how our words and reactions can diffuse or escalate situations. How have you seen the power of a gentle response or active listening? Can you share personal experiences when choosing to respond with kindness or restraint resulted in peace and understanding?
3. **The Role of Patience and Overlooking Offenses:** Proverbs 19:11-12 highlights the virtue of overlooking an offense. In a world that often encourages us to stand up for ourselves and confront every slight, how can we find the balance between defending what's right and choosing to let go for the sake of peace? How does this Proverb relate to Jesus' teachings on forgiveness and turning the other cheek?

ANXIETY/WORRY

A condition of the mind characterized by unease or apprehension about potential outcomes or the well-being of others. This sentiment can span from a valid unease related to life's demands to intense and consuming fears arising from a skewed viewpoint of life's challenges. While Jesus understood and acknowledged the natural human inclination towards concern for necessities such as sustenance or shelter, He imparted wisdom urging us to maintain a godly perspective. By prioritizing God's kingdom and righteousness, we are reminded that other concerns will be addressed in God's providence and perfect timing.

Don't worry about anything, but in everything, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the Peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:6-7

Struggling with anxiety can be an overwhelming experience, and many seek guidance and comfort to overcome it. This passage is particularly relevant for those who struggle with anxiety because it provides a roadmap to peace through prayer and gratitude. It encourages those you counsel to turn their worries into prayers, laying out specific concerns before God and thanking Him for His constant care. By adopting an attitude of prayer and supplication, this passage states that people can find a peace that surpasses all understanding, even amid anxiety-inducing circumstances. This peace is described as a guard for the heart and mind, signifying protection against the turmoil/uneasiness that anxiety can bring. The message is not a dismissal of anxiety but rather a way to process and handle it by relying on faith and connection to God. This passage's emphasis on open communication with God and trust in His provision offers a spiritual mechanism for anxiety. It speaks directly to the restless heart, offering comfort and wisdom to those wrestling with worry, emphasizing that they are not alone in their struggle.

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable—if there is any moral excellence and if there is anything praiseworthy—dwell on these things. Philippians 4:8

This passage encourages individuals to focus their minds on things that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, and praiseworthy. For those struggling with anxiety, this mandate can be a grounding practice that shifts attention away from fears and worries. Anxiety often involves dwelling on potential adverse outcomes or uncertainties; this verse redirects that focus on the Word. It's not a superficial avoidance of problems but rather a constructive approach to frame challenges within a perspective of faith and hope. Paul provides a biblical guide for managing anxiety by focusing on biblical truth and what brings God praise, glory, and honor.

Do what you have learned and received and heard from me, and seen in me, and the God of Peace will be with you. Philippians 4:9

Paul emphasizes the importance of practicing biblical truth, offering valuable instruction for those dealing with anxiety. Encouraging individuals to concentrate on what is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, and commendable shifts attention away from worry and fear. Focusing on these truths can create a mindset that encourages those you counsel to stop thinking anxious thoughts and focus more on God's Word. Anxiety often arises from uncertainty and unrealistic/irrational fears. Emphasize focusing on Christ, which can form a wall against such fears. A blueprint for a life guided by wisdom, virtue, and faith by presenting a practical and spiritual means of addressing anxiety is provided in this passage.

Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my concerns. See if there is any offensive way in me; lead me in the everlasting way. Psalm 139:23-24

This text is most accurately translated from the Hebrew as follows: “*Search me, God, and know my heart; Put me to the test and know my anxious thoughts; And see if there is any hurtful way in me. And lead me in the everlasting way.*”

This alternative translation is significant because of what it teaches about anxiety. When God searches and tests individuals, He does so by examining hearts. While people often think of anxiety as an unexplained emotion, this text clarifies that anxiety results from how someone thinks in his or her heart. While outward circumstances can be hurtful, this text explains that inner thoughts are the most hurtful part of any difficulty. Ultimately, anxiety is a self-inflicted wound in which individuals harm themselves with their own anxious thoughts. The Psalmist’s prayer to be led in the way everlasting implies that anxiety-producing thoughts lead one away from God, and a humble cry to be led back is part of the necessary remedy for these fears.

Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not rely on your own understanding; in all your ways know him, and he will make your paths straight. Don’t be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and turn away from evil. This will be healing for your body and strengthening for your bones.” Proverbs 3:5-8

One of the biggest struggles we have with anxiety is the double-minded nature of overthinking. This passage teaches us that through trusting in God and NOT in our own thoughts or wisdom, reality will unfold as God plans it. The wisdom that comes through depending on God helps turn people away from the evil that dominates their minds and allows healing and strength to fill their bodies. The mind is the gateway to the body, and a mind that trusts God leads to a body that knows rest.

Tremble, and do not sin; Meditate in your heart upon your bed and be still. Selah. Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and trust in the Lord. Psalm 4:4-5

Psalm 4 is a short psalm of David crying out in distress and anxiety. For those struggling with anxiety and worry, sometimes we feel as if there is nothing we can do to stop the pain, nor anything we can do to prevent the anxiousness from coming upon us. Our bodies will be triggered by stimuli that lead us into a worried state, but God does not hold us accountable for the things out of our control. It is our response *to* anxiousness, like David’s, that God is looking for. David says that it is possible to “tremble” yet not sin. When we are trembling with anxiety or worry, we must meditate on how trustworthy and faithful God is in our struggle and be still. Being still is hard, but we must learn to do it as David did.

You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you. Isaiah 26:3

Anxiety is less about gaining control of your life and more about trusting God. It is normal to feel anxious about something because we know we cannot control the situation. When we find ourselves here, we need to trust God has us right where He wants us. To trust God, we need to know who He is. When we read the Bible and spend time with Him, we need to do it through the lens of ‘what does this tell me about God?’ not ‘what does this tell me about me?’. If we grow greater in our knowledge of God and better understand who He is, then we can rest in the fact that God has everything in control.

Practical Advice + Homework

Confess Sin: Distrust of God lies behind the sin of anxiety and worry, and you must recognize that truth, as you humbly confess this sin (Jer. 17:5-8). Knowing that God is faithful to forgive and cleanse your heart following this confession encourages this humble and obedient action. (Homework: Stop right now and confess the sin of your distrust of God. You must confess this root to kill the fruit of fear and worry).

Renew Your Mind Through Scripture: Understanding anxiety and worry from God's perspective is critical to change. (Homework: Read the following biblical texts to understand God's call to give up fear and worry: Jeremiah 17:5-8, Luke 10:38-42, and Philippians 4:5b-7. Answer these questions from the biblical text you just read: What did you learn about God in this text? What did you learn about yourself? How do your thinking, feelings and actions need to change considering these truths?)

Obey God: Be faithful in putting off anxiety and worry and putting on prayer with thanksgiving in its place. (Homework: Spend time with God in His Word each day, attend worship at your church each week, keep a journal of thanksgiving, offer them back to God in prayer, and memorize and mediate on Phil. 4:5b-7, use this text to direct your responses whenever you feel afraid).

Root Cause: When you are anxious about something, there is usually a deeper cause; some triggers might make you feel anxious. (Homework: Spend time reflecting and journaling what makes you anxious this week. Then, evaluate if there is a common theme throughout these things. Spend time praying God would come into these parts in your life where you are not fully trusting Him.)

Reading Through the Pain: When anxious thoughts arise, stop what you are doing and read aloud Proverbs 3:5-8. Though this may seem like a hassle, you make a physical gesture to remind yourself that God is in control, not your circumstances. In moments of anxiety, physically leaving where you are, mentally leaving your mindset, and replacing your anxious thoughts with Scripture also train your mind to focus on God in these situations. Please do this as often as you feel that anxiety is taking over your mind, no matter how often it happens in a day. (Homework: Journal specific times when anxiety starts, write out what thoughts you are having, pray that God would still your heart, and write the time your anxiety ends. This will give evidence to you and your counselor that your anxiety has a start and end time, showing that it does not last forever. This also pairs with reading through Proverbs 3:5-8. As you write down your thoughts, they will be juxtaposed with biblical truth, making you compare them and see if they align with Scripture. Spoiler alert: they probably will not.)

Be Still: Psalm 46:10 says, "Be still and know that I am God." A crying baby needs to be held close and rocked to sleep, and as it cries and screams, the baby eventually drifts off to sleep peacefully. This is you and I amid our worry; the Father must hold us until we drift off into a stillness that comforts us. (Homework: When you are anxious, try to stop what you are doing and pray. Write down what upset you or triggered this moment and ask the Lord to help you endure. Journal these thoughts to pray about them when you are not upset.)

Release Burdens: Remember that God invites us to cast our burdens onto Him, trusting in His Love and care for us. Believers are to present their worries to God in prayer, remembering that there is a promise of peace, and that God will guard their hearts and minds. (Homework: Write down your primary sources of anxiety on slips of paper, pray, and place them in a "worry jar," symbolizing your act of giving them to God.)

Live in the Present: Resist the urge to agonize over the future; focus on the blessings and tasks of today. This is consistent with Matthew 6:34 about not worrying about tomorrow, instead focusing on gratitude.

(Homework: Each morning, list three things you're grateful for, and at night, reflect on one moment from the day when you felt peace or joy.)

Discussion Starters

1. **The Heart's Cry Amidst Anxiety:** Psalm 139:23-24 encourages us to ask God to search and know our hearts, especially our anxious thoughts. Reflect on a recent time when anxiety weighed heavily on your heart. What were the root thoughts or beliefs that fueled this anxiety? Recognizing that anxiety often arises from our innermost thoughts, how can surrendering these fears to God and seeking His everlasting way bring you peace and redirect your heart toward Him?
2. **The Power of Trust Over Overthinking:** The verses from Proverbs 3:5-8 emphasize the importance of trusting in the Lord rather than relying on our own understanding. How have moments of overthinking or self-reliance caused unrest in your life? By trusting God and His promises, how can you experience healing and strength in your mind and throughout your entire being?
3. **Scripture as the Anchor in Anxious Times:** Philippians 4:8 guides where our minds should dwell, especially during moments of anxiety. Can you recall a recent situation where your focus shifted away from these truths and towards worries or fears? How might intentionally grounding your thoughts in what is true, honorable, and praiseworthy change your response to anxious triggers and better align your perspective with God's promises?

DEPRESSION

An emotional state marked by despondency, discouragement, and sorrow. This condition often aligns with feelings of personal powerlessness and a diminished zest for life. Scriptural narratives depict several individuals who demonstrate signs of depression stemming from varied circumstances. As believers turn to the Scriptures, they find solace and guidance in navigating this complex emotional terrain, recognizing that God's presence and promises offer hope and restoration.

The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears, and rescues them from all their troubles. The Lord is near the brokenhearted; he saves those crushed in Spirit. Psalm 34:17-18

For someone struggling with depression, seeking comfort and understanding is often a crucial part of the healing process. Psalm 34:17-18 speaks to the closeness of God to the brokenhearted and His attentiveness to their cry. It reassures that even in despair, one is never alone; a compassionate presence is ready to hear and respond. This passage can be a source of hope, emphasizing that our Father in Heaven acknowledges the feelings of sadness and isolation. It encourages reaching out in prayer or reflection, working on a connection that might alleviate some pain. By focusing on this spiritual dimension, an individual may find a supportive framework that helps overcome depression.

Why, my soul, are you so dejected? Why are you in such turmoil? Put your hope in God, for I will still praise him, my Savior, and my God. Psalm 42:11

Dealing with depression often involves a journey toward hope and healing, which can be complex. Psalm 42:11 speaks to the soul, urging individuals to put their hope in God despite feelings of despair and turmoil. This message encourages us to look beyond our current circumstances and to find solace in God. The verse's poignant question, "Why, my soul, are you so dejected?" reflects an internal dialogue that many facing depression might recognize. One can find a pathway out of despair by focusing on faith and hope in God, knowing He loves us. It's a reminder that emotions are transient, and healing and peace are attainable through Him. The verse's message is not a quick fix but a perspective shift, providing comfort and encouragement for those in need.

Come to me, all of you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Matthew 11:28

Battling depression can be an exhausting and overwhelming experience, often leading to feelings of hopelessness and despair. In Matthew 11:28, the invitation to come to Jesus for rest and relief is a powerful reminder of the compassion and understanding available for those weary and burdened. This passage offers a sense of hope, accentuating that help is available for those who seek it. By turning to Christ, individuals struggling with depression may find a source of comfort and strength beyond their own capabilities. This concept resonates deeply with many who feel overwhelmed by their struggles and seek solace and healing. Amid depression, this invitation to find rest in a caring and understanding presence can be a beacon of hope, guiding the way toward peace.

So, I say, "My strength has perished, and so has my hope from the Lord" ... "The Lord is my portion," says my soul, "Therefore I have hope in Him." Lamentations 3:18, 24 (NASB 95)

When Jeremiah recorded these words, he was struggling with the nation of Judah and their unwillingness to submit to God's will. The Babylonians were coming to defeat them, and his people thought he was a spy and treated him harshly. He saw NO hope before him, and his spirit was crushed. However, as he then writes, he was reminded that there is always hope in the Lord. Christians must understand that events and circumstances in our lives in a fallen world will happen, and they will test our

resolve to trust that God is sovereign and has a plan for us. Being proactive in bringing our thoughts captive to Christ amid despair is imperative to combating depression. Even if you do not feel, see, or even struggle to believe it, get up today and live as if our hope in Christ is real.

Practical Advice + Homework:

Confess Sin: At the heart of genuine depression (not righteous sorrow and grief over loss) lies a distrust of God (Homework: If this is true in your situation, stop right now and confess the sin of failing to trust God).

Renew Your Mind Through Scripture: God's Word reminds us that He is trustworthy (Homework: Read the following biblical text to understand God's call to trust Him no matter our circumstances: Jeremiah 17:5-8. Answer these questions from the biblical text you just read: What did you learn about God? What did you learn about trust? How do your thinking, feelings, and actions need to change considering these truths?)

Obey God: Focus on the truth about God and His character. (Homework: Spend time with God in His Word each day, attend worship at your church each week, list responsibilities you are failing to fulfill, and complete one more each week).

Seek God in Your Despair and Pray: I don't know about you, but the ability and freedom to pray powerfully helps me. When my prayer life is on order there is a peace that passes all understanding. Realizing that my heavenly Father, who created the universe, takes time to listen and answer all my prayers brings peace. Yes, he answers all prayers. We must accept that "no" is an answer. (Homework: Spend some quiet time reflecting on God's Word and Pray Without Ceasing daily.)

Have an Attitude of Gratitude: I've been encouraging those I work with for years to get out of their heads, to quit wallowing in self-pity, and help others. During my second month of sobriety, I was told to volunteer at a free state-run detox called Charlie Street in Southern California. I'll never forget seeing a guy mopping the floor with no legs on the ground. It was his chore to be able to go to the detox. It has been a daily reminder of how blessed I am and how much I have to be grateful for. (Homework: Spend some time helping at a homeless shelter or detox center; it will quickly teach you about gratitude.)

Engage in Act of Service: Sometimes, amid our despair, we quit and give up on what we know to be God's will. These things could be simple everyday actions like praying with your kids, fixing lunch for the family, serving in a ministry opportunity on the weekend, or just getting a shower and going to work. (Homework: Make a list of small tasks that you can complete, things that matter and have purpose no matter how small, and pray for strength to do them, and then do them one by one.)

Don't Believe the Lies: Our mind may be telling us that we are unworthy, a piece of garbage, or that no one likes us. The sooner you recognize those unbiblical thoughts, you can combat them with biblical truth. When we understand our identity as children of God and that He created us in HIS image, we realize that God does not create garbage. (Homework: Address each of the negative and unbiblical thoughts. If you need someone to help you distinguish between true and false, talk to someone.)

Have FUN! Go Outside or Exercise: Sometimes depression can run us into the ground. We may feel very tired and fatigued. One of the ways that I've found to be super helpful is doing things I love. When feeling down and out, I call my sister and ask her to spend time with her kids. Seeing them run around, laugh, and give me hugs.... that's fun for me. (Homework: Find a hobby/activity that you can do that will bring God praise, glory, and honor.)

Discussion Starters:

1. **Dependence on God in Despair:** Given the promise in Psalm 34:17-18 that God hears the righteous and is close to the brokenhearted, how can you integrate this truth into your daily life? How might a deeper reliance on God's nearness provide solace in your moments of deep sadness or despair?
2. **Internal Dialogue with the Soul:** In Psalm 42:11 the psalmist speaks directly to his own soul during deep anguish. Can you relate to this internal dialogue? How can meditating on God's unwavering character shift your focus from despair to hope, even in the darkest moments?
3. **Addressing Unbiblical Thoughts:** Jeremiah felt moments of despair but was reminded of the enduring hope in the Lord. What unbiblical thoughts or lies have you noticed taking root in your mind? How can you counteract these with the truths of who you are in Christ and your hope in Him?

DRUNKENNESS

A state of diminished cognitive and physical faculties induced by the excessive intake of alcohol or other mind-altering substances. Throughout the Word, drunkenness is denounced as a detrimental behavior incompatible with a life of righteousness and spiritual vigilance. The Bible often underscores the virtues of sobriety, alertness, and self-mastery, placing them in sharp contrast to the pitfalls of overindulgence in alcohol. Portraying a person overtaken by alcohol is a metaphorical depiction of the desolation those who oppose God's will and authority face.

And don't get drunk with wine, which leads to reckless living, but be filled by the Spirit: Ephesians 5:18

Paul directly addresses the issue of drunkenness by instructing believers not to get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead of seeking escape from life's trials or celebrating in intoxication, the verse encourages believers to be filled with the Holy Spirit. The juxtaposition between drunkenness and spiritual fulfillment underscores that genuine joy and purpose are found in a relationship with God, not temporary pleasures. By warning against debauchery, the Scripture highlights the negative behaviors and consequences of excessive drinking. The instruction positions sobriety not as a mere avoidance of alcohol but as a proactive pursuit of spiritual growth. Paul's guidance serves as a moral compass, urging Christians to prioritize their spiritual well-being over worldly indulgence. Through this verse, the Bible promotes a life of self-control, spiritual depth, and meaningful engagement with God over fleeting pleasures like drunkenness.

Give beer to the one who is dying and wine to one whose life is bitter. Let him drink so that he can forget his poverty and remember his trouble no more. Proverbs 31:6-7

Drunkenness is a state that many who are struggling find themselves in. Solomon tells us that those who are perishing (or perceive that they are perishing), those who are bitter in life, those who are in poverty, and those who are just "troubled" tend to find drinking as the antidote for their pain, something that will numb their pain until death. The idolatry of drunkenness is apparent in this passage for many reasons: 1) Those who are saved never perish, and to live is Christ and to die is gain. 2) Bitterness results from anger and unforgiveness towards man or God that has not been adequately dealt with. 3) Poverty is something that overcomes the faithful and the evil at times, but God supplies all our needs. 4) Trouble is guaranteed in this life, but how we respond to it teaches us to trust the Lord. The reality is that the one described here who has turned to a substance that could lead to "forgetting" the things of the Lord and to lose sight of God's provision and goodness.

Wine is a mocker; beer is a brawler; whoever goes astray because of them is not wise. Proverbs 20:1

This passage straightforwardly warns about the dangers of wine and strong drink by asserting that whoever is led astray by them lacks wisdom. The proverb identifies alcohol as a mocker and strong drink as a brawler, characterizing their deceptive and combative impacts. The verse implies that while alcohol might seem appealing, it often leads to negative and unpredictable behaviors. By stating that those who are deceived by alcohol lack understanding, the Scripture emphasizes the importance of discernment and wise choices. The Bible consistently promotes wisdom and knowledge as virtues, suggesting that drunkenness contradicts a life of bringing God praise, glory, and honor. This proverb serves as a foundational reminder about the deceptive allure of alcohol and its potential to divert individuals from righteous living. It encourages believers to prioritize sobriety and to seek wisdom in all areas of life, including their consumption choices.

No thieves, greedy people, drunkards, verbally abusive people, or swindlers will inherit God's kingdom.
1 Corinthians 6:10

Paul lists drunkards among those who will not inherit the Kingdom of God, underscoring the spiritual consequences of consistent drunkenness. This Scripture places drunkenness alongside other morally severe failings, highlighting its gravity in the Christian life. Paul urges believers to recognize the spiritual implications of their physical actions. Paul emphasizes the eternal significance of one's earthly behaviors. Drunkenness is something to be left behind as it has no place in God's Kingdom. It is as much a sin as stealing and greed. This verse serves as a potent reminder for believers to prioritize sobriety as an integral part of righteous living.

Practical Advice + Homework:

Confess Sin: The heart of a drunkard is an idol-worshipping one. Both unbelievers and believers must turn away from this idol and turn to God (Homework: If this is true in your situation, stop right now and confess the sin of idolatry which has led to your drunkenness. If you are an unbeliever, commit your life to Christ, trusting Him to save you—both body and soul).

Renew Your Mind Through Scripture: God's Word reminds us that we are to find comfort in Him alone (Homework: Read the following biblical texts to understand God as our true source of comfort: John 14:16-18, 2 Corinthians 1:3-7, 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17. Answer these questions from the biblical text you just read: What did you learn about God? What did you learn about discipline? How do your thinking, feelings, and actions need to change considering these truths?)

Obey God: Turn to Him for comfort. (Homework: Spend time with God in His Word each day, attend worship at your church each week, ask fellow believers to hold you accountable to turn to God rather than to alcohol, and avoid places where you will be tempted.)

Seek the Spirit: Instead of seeking escape or solace in alcohol, find joy, comfort, and purpose in the Holy Spirit. This confirms the Bible's command to be filled with the Holy Spirit rather than with wine (Ephesians 5:18), emphasizing a daily connection with God's comforting presence. (Homework: Spend 10 minutes daily in quiet reflection or prayer, asking God to fill you with His Spirit.)

Recognize the Deception: While alcohol might offer relief or fun, it can deceive and lead to unwise choices; reflect on Proverbs 20:1, a reminder that wine's allure can lead to folly and harm. (Homework: Reflect on Proverbs 20:1 and write down any negative consequences you've witnessed or experienced due to drunkenness.)

Contemplate Eternal Consequences: Consider the long-term spiritual consequences of continual drunkenness; this directs attention to 1 Corinthians 6:10, highlighting the serious spiritual implications of persistent drunkenness. (Homework: Meditate on 1 Corinthians 6:10, journaling about what it means for your spiritual journey and eternal destination.)

Remember the Lord's Goodness: Whatever you try to "forget" in life, understand that the Lord sees it all. Phil. 3:13-14 tells us to "forget" what is behind by "pressing on" to what is ahead in Christ! We do not forget by drunkenness but by willful obedience to walk in His ways. (Homework: Get your mind off the things you seek to forget by focusing on how you can serve the Lord right now and do that. Whether it be an act of service or simply refusing to give in to sin, decide and carry it out, remembering that the Lord is with you even during your struggle.)

Replace with Positive Habits: Cultivate healthy habits that offer genuine relaxation and relief without the side effects of alcohol. I've always said that sobriety is easy, it's just not picking up a drink or drug. The hard part is learning how to live life without the mind-alerting substances. (Homework: Find an alternative activity, like exercise, reading, or a new hobby, to engage in when tempted to drink or do drugs. In my first year of sobriety, all I did was work, church, bible study, gym, martial arts, and hang out with people who supported my decision to get sober.)

Discussion Starters:

- 1. Confronting the Idol of Alcohol:** Given the biblical passages that equate drunkenness with idolatry, how do you identify and address the temptation of alcohol in your life? How can recognizing and confessing this idolatry lead you to a deeper relationship with God and away from the temporary and deceptive comfort of alcohol?
- 2. Spiritual Implications of Habitual Drinking:** Reflecting on 1 Corinthians 6:10, which underscores the gravity of consistent drunkenness, how does understanding the eternal consequences impact your perspective on alcohol consumption? How might meditating on our choices' eternal rewards and ramifications realign your priorities and choices?
- 3. Seeking True Comfort:** The Scriptures emphasize turning to God for genuine comfort rather than seeking solace in substances like alcohol. How have you experienced or witnessed the fleeting comfort of alcohol in contrast to the lasting peace found in Christ? In your moments of distress, pain, or celebration, how can you cultivate a habit of seeking the Holy Spirit's filling as described in Ephesians 5:18?

SUICIDAL THOUGHTS

Note: Again, it's essential to emphasize that if someone is in immediate danger of self-harm or expressing severe suicidal thoughts, professional medical intervention (911) must be sought without delay. A pastor, counselor, or friend should ensure the person is connected with appropriate medical professionals and support systems if they are an immediate danger to themselves or others.

A sense of hopelessness and despair leads individuals to contemplate ending their own lives. Such pain resonates with many biblical figures, like Elijah, who once prayed for his own death, saying, "It is enough! Now, O Lord, take away my life" (1 Kings 19:4). Jonah, too, wished for death in his distress. In navigating these harrowing feelings, it's crucial to seek refuge in God's promises, the support of the faith community, and to remember that every life, including our own, holds immense value in God's eyes.

The Spirit of the LORD GOD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and freedom to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor, and the day of our God's vengeance; to comfort all who mourn, to provide for those who mourn in Zion; to give them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, festive oil instead of mourning, and splendid clothes instead of despair. And they will be called righteous trees, planted by the LORD to glorify him.

Isaiah 61:1-3

Isaiah captures the prophetic mission of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, to bring restoration, healing, and hope to the broken-hearted. In the darkest recesses of the human mind, where suicidal thoughts may lurk, this promise stands as a beacon of hope. The passage emphasizes the divine commission to "heal the brokenhearted" - directly speaking to those whose spirits are shattered, weighed down by despair, or feeling trapped in their own minds, much like "captives" and "prisoners." The "year of the LORD's favor" promise reassures that God's grace and mercies are ever-present, ready to envelop those who feel forsaken. Transitioning from mourning to a "crown of beauty" and from "despair" to "splendid clothes" underscores the transformative power of God's love. These contrasting images serve as vivid reminders that one's current state of anguish and suffering is not the end but can be transformed through the divine intervention of Jesus Christ. This promise extends to the notion of them being "righteous trees, planted by the LORD." Trees symbolize strength, growth, and longevity, suggesting that those who lean into God's promises will find immediate solace and a long-lasting purpose, deeply rooted in God's love, ready to bear fruits of righteousness. For someone battling suicidal ideations, this passage is a life-affirming testament to the love, purpose, and hope in Jesus Christ, encouraging them to see beyond their present pain to a future filled with God's favor and glory.

Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Hebrews 12:1-2

Paul's message in this Scripture provides solace for those wrestling with suicidal ideations, emphasizing endurance, perseverance, and hope amidst adversity. The "great cloud of witnesses" illustrates that many before us faced trials yet triumphed through faith in God, reminding us that we aren't isolated in our struggles. The verse urges us to shed the burdens and sins ensnaring us, acknowledging the hardships of life but emphasizing God's overarching purpose. It likens life to a marathon, requiring stamina, even though weariness and doubt. Crucially, the passage centers on Jesus, who, despite immense suffering, remained steadfast, concentrating on the joy of humanity's redemption. His endurance

symbolizes that hope and a divine plan persist even in darkness. This Scripture becomes a beacon for those grappling with despair, emphasizing the importance of anchoring oneself in the eternal hope found in Jesus.

The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit. Psalm 34:18

For someone grappling with suicidal thoughts, this passage can be a reminder that God is close during life's darkest moments. It reassures that God recognizes and understands the pain, providing a comforting embrace. By focusing on this verse, an individual may sense God's presence, even in the deepest despair. This verse's choice helps to connect the individual's struggles and God's constant companionship. It opens the way for prayer and reflection, knowing one is not alone. It's a vital reminder that God's love transcends the darkness, and His saving grace is available to the crushed in spirit. Encouraging a relationship with God through this passage can foster a sense of security and hope.

For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. Jeremiah 29:11

Hope can feel elusive when dealing with suicidal thoughts, but this promise from God offers a vision of a future filled with hope, even when current circumstances seem unbearable. It emphasizes that God has intentional and loving plans for each person, affirming their value and purpose. This passage can act as an anchor, helping the individual to focus on God's love and His promises, despite the present turmoil. It's a reassurance that the struggle is not the end of the story and that God's love will guide them toward healing. By contemplating this verse, the individual can begin to shift their focus away from despair towards the promise of God's loving intention. It is an essential aspect of restoring hope and building resilience.

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Matthew 11:28

Feeling overwhelmed and burdened often accompanies suicidal thoughts, making this invitation from Jesus particularly relevant. It offers much-needed relief and understanding by promising rest and peace in Christ. This verse was chosen because it reminds those struggling that they can turn to Christ for peace and strength, even when their own resources feel completely depleted. It provides an image of Christ waiting to embrace them, to take their burdens, and to provide solace. The choice of this verse underlines the empathy and compassion of Jesus, who intimately understands human suffering. By turning to Him, a struggling individual can find a refuge, a place to rest, and an opportunity to heal. It's a critical component in navigating the journey from despair toward restoration.

Practical Advice + Homework:

Confess sin: Since God is the only One who has the right to take a life, your desire to do so usurps His rightful role (1 Samuel 2:6-7). It is also a desire that lines up with the intents of Satan for you (John 8:44). (Homework: If this is true in your situation, stop right now and confess the sin of wanting to die, to God).

Renew your Mind through Scripture: God's Word exhorts us to live life for His purposes not our own. We have no right to take our own lives. (Homework: Read the following biblical text to understand how to deal with a desire to die: Romans 8. Answer these questions from the biblical text you just read: What did you learn about God? What did you learn about yourself? How do your thinking, feelings and actions need to change in light of these truths?)

Obey God by choosing to live for Him rather than according to your desires. (Homework: Spend time with God in His Word each day, attend worship at your church each week, read Romans 8 every day, ask God by His Spirit to speak to you through this portion of His Word, and write down each new truth that He shows you from this passage).

Reflect on the Hope God Gave Others: It is essential to remember the works of the Lord daily so that we do not forget how faithful he has been through the centuries. (Homework: Turn to Hebrews 11 and pick one individual listed in this list of faithful people daily. Go find their stories in the Old Testament and read them, journaling how God was faithful to them and how that same God has been faithful to you today.)

Seek God in Desperation: Reach out to God in prayer, knowing He is close to the brokenhearted. This can provide immense comfort and guidance for those with suicidal thoughts, reinforcing the belief that God is close to the brokenhearted and understands their pain. (Homework: Reflect on Psalm 34:18 daily, journaling your thoughts and prayers, seeking God's nearness.)

Phone Pal: Find one or more people who will listen to you when you have discouraging thoughts. When you feel alone, discouraged, or lonely, reach out to them and have a normal conversation. In the same way, God is always listening, some people want to know how you are doing. Though people are not always available, have multiple people willing to talk to you. (Homework: Read Psalm 34:17-20, Psalm 147:1-6, and Matthew 11:28-30 and write out everything you observe about God dealing with the oppressed, brokenhearted, and weary. Be ready to discuss your observations in the next meeting.)

Find Rest in Jesus: Turn to Christ when feeling overwhelmed, seeking His peace and strength. Finding rest in Jesus is helpful for those with suicidal thoughts as it offers a personal connection to Christ during overwhelming moments and provides a sense of peace and strength, emphasizing reliance on His love and understanding rather than despair. (Homework: Spend time in prayer, envisioning yourself giving your burdens to Jesus based on Matthew 11:28.)

Build a Support System: It is vital to have regular communication with trusted friends, family, or a biblical counselor/pastor. By surrounding themselves with trusted friends, family, or church leaders, those who struggle with suicidal thoughts can find hope and strength in God's truth and love. (Homework: Identify and meet with a supportive person weekly, sharing your feelings and allowing them to encourage and pray with you.) Work with a counselor or pastor to create a safety plan with actionable steps if suicidal thoughts intensify.

Discussion Starters:

1. **Embracing the Messiah's Mission:** Isaiah 61:1-3 paints a vivid picture of Jesus Christ's mission to heal and restore the brokenhearted. Can you reflect on a time in your life when you felt Christ's transformative power, moving you from a place of despair to a state of hope and joy? How can you remind yourself daily of God's promises, especially when facing challenges or despair?
2. **Running the Divine Race:** Hebrews 12:1-2 encourages us to persevere and fix our eyes on Jesus. How do you envision the "race" that God has set before you? What encumbrances or sins do you feel are hindering you from running this race with endurance? In moments of weariness, how can you better fix your eyes on Jesus, drawing strength from His example and the hope He offers?
3. **God's Nearness in Despair:** Multiple verses, such as Psalm 34:18 and Matthew 11:28,

emphasize God's closeness and the rest He provides to those in despair. How do you experience God's nearness in your moments of pain or brokenness? How can you cultivate a deeper relationship with Him, ensuring you always feel His comforting presence, especially when burdened or overwhelmed?