

Bipolar Hope: Personal Guide to Management

“The behaviors around bipolar are not your fault, when your brain chemistry changes you make decisions you normally would not. There is no shame, there is only hope.”

— Daniel Schott

Dedication

To my wife, Alyssa.

You stood by me through hell and high water. Thank you for walking with me through every high, every low, and every messy season. Your love, strength, and patience have meant more than I can say. This book exists in large part because of you and your belief that better days were still ahead.

With deep love and appreciation,

Daniel

How to Use This Book

Think of this as a practical toolbox rather than something you have to read straight through from beginning to end. Start wherever you are right now. If you need encouragement today, read My Story. When you're ready for help with a specific struggle, flip to the chapter that matches what you're facing. There is no pressure to do everything at once. Just pick one small thing that feels doable, talk it over with your doctor or counselor, and give yourself grace. God meets us right where we are in these steady, small steps.

My Story

I'm Daniel, 49, living in Grand Forks, North Dakota. I'm married to Alyssa and I'm a professional dad of six kids. After more than twenty years in high tech I shifted my focus to family and ministry. Bipolar I has been part of my life for a long time. There have been seasons where everything feels electric and full of possibility. Then come the crashes. The ones where getting out of bed feels impossible. There is no feeling, no joy, no contentment. Just pain and defeat. You wonder how you can possibly endure this much longer and how you will go on. The mental fatigue of simply getting through the day is overwhelming. It becomes a constant fight just to keep your mind focused on hope. Then comes the shame after impulsive decisions made during the highs, the way it strains your marriage, affects your kids, and creates financial chaos.

One of the lowest moments came when I had to go to Utah for treatment. Alyssa told me the children were crying and asking if I was coming back. I had poured money into a startup that failed and I was in a deep, dark hole. But even in that pain I learned something important. People with bipolar can still take on high-intensity projects, but we need strong boundaries, clear communication, good sleep habits, and the ability to recognize when hypo-mania or depression is starting.

A year after that treatment, I started working with my brother, David, on a solid daily morning routine and a specific diet. The deep dips in depression became more manageable. The late-afternoon anxiety attacks didn't hit as hard. My Christian counselor also helped me see that shame after falling short is destructive. We are not the ones who produce good fruit on our own. We depend on God for strength, and there can even be joy in suffering because it teaches us to rely on Him more fully.

That is why I wrote this book. The mess that bipolar has created in your life is not your fault. The recurring cycles are part of the disease. But you can take real, practical steps toward a better life. Never lose hope. Talk to people who have found ways to move forward. The pain from the past can become powerful fuel for the steps needed to manage this well.

I also want to thank my cousin Peggy. She encouraged me and believed in me when I was struggling to get these words down. There were many months when I delayed or only managed a few pages, but thinking “Peggy is waiting for this, I gotta get it done” kept me going. Thank you, Peggy.

Part 1 – Understanding What You’re Facing

Emergency Care & When to Get Help

If you are in crisis, having thoughts of harming yourself or others, or feel completely out of control, please stop reading this book right now and get help immediately. Call 988 (in the US), go to the nearest emergency room, or contact your doctor or care team. This book is for non-emergency management and support between those harder moments. Always talk to your doctor or psychiatrist before making any changes to medication or treatment. I am not a doctor. I am just someone who has walked this road and found some things that help.

Non-Emergency Management – The Foundation

For most of us living with bipolar, the real work happens in the quieter times between the big swings. This is where we build habits and awareness that help us stay more stable. The sections that follow are based on what has worked for me personally. Everyone’s bipolar is different, so work closely with your own provider and counselor. What I share here is not medical advice. It is simply one man’s experience of finding a path toward a better life even while carrying this condition.

Self-Check for Hypomania/Mania

I have learned to watch for certain early signs in myself. I wake up with a tremendous amount of energy. I start knocking out an above-normal number of tasks in the morning. Sometimes I notice a jittery feeling like I had too much caffeine even though I haven’t had any. When I catch these early, I can often head off a full swing. I check in with my wife or my good friend Terry. I make sure I protect my sleep. I slow down and ask God for wisdom instead of charging ahead.

Self-Check for Depression

Depression for me often looks like losing interest in things I normally enjoy. I have no desire to go out on the pontoon with my youngest son to find new fishing spots. Big developments in AI that would normally excite me just feel flat. I end up spending most of my free time flipping through my phone, which leaves me even more down. It is like I have drained all the dopamine it can give and I’m still empty inside. When I notice these signs, I try to be gentle with myself. I do the smallest next thing I can manage. I reach out to someone who knows me. And I remind myself that this season does not define me.

Self-Check for Anxiety

My anxiety is usually generalized. Almost every little task can feel threatening. Taking a shower, walking the dog, even planning a family trip used to fill me with dread before we got my medication and routines dialed in. Now when things are stable, I actually enjoy the planning and the anticipation.

Maintenance and Prevention of Cycling

The goal is not to eliminate every feeling, but to reduce the wild swings and protect the people I love. This means working closely with my Christian counselor, keeping a very consistent daily routine, protecting sleep, managing stress, and never missing medication. When I stay on top of these things, the cycles become less frequent and less severe.

Kay Redfield Jamison has written that consistent daily routines and early recognition of warning signs are among the most important factors in long-term stability.

Part 2 – Daily Habits That Actually Work

Never Miss Medication + Working With Your Provider

Medication is not a sign of weakness. For most of us with bipolar it is a foundation. I have learned the hard way that skipping doses or letting routines slip leads to consequences I do not want to repeat. Work closely with a good psychiatrist. If the chemistry with your current provider is not right, keep looking until you find one who listens.

Learn Your Triggers

Knowing your personal triggers is one of the most powerful tools you have. For me, one big trigger was sunrise photography. I loved getting up early, chasing beautiful light, praising God for His creation, and honestly enjoying the views and attention the photos would get. Over time those early mornings, repeated high emotional experiences, and social media feedback all added up and poured gasoline on a fire I didn't see coming. Other triggers include springtime, social media dopamine loops, and highly emotional music.

7-Days-a-Week Routine & Small Wins

A steady daily rhythm has been life-changing for me. Even on hard days I try to do the basics: basic hygiene, a short devotional, prayer, and one worship song. The key is consistency, not perfection.

Understanding Hypomania and Mania

It helps to know the difference. Hypomania is the “up” state where you have lots of energy, ideas, and confidence. It can feel good and productive at first, but it often leads to poor decisions if it builds. Mania is more intense. For me as a Type I, it can include paranoia, connecting things that aren't really connected, and thoughts that are not based in reality. I have been fortunate to be in the hands of experienced bipolar providers who changed medication to help me recover from this quickly. But left unchecked it will lead to a hospital visit or else self harm.

Strict Sleep Habits

Sleep is non-negotiable. When I let it slip, I start getting early signs of moving from hypomania to mania. Protecting a solid 8 hours (sometimes with help from a sleep aid if needed) has prevented many cycles.

Daily Physical Activity & Strength Training

Walking. Walking. Walking. That is my foundation. Then I add a couple of simple strength machines for arms and at least one for legs. The mood lift is not always immediate, but over time it builds real resilience.

Daily Social Interaction & Accountability

Even when I don't feel like it, reaching out matters. I have a solid Christian brother, Terry, who has been there through everything. Having safe people who know your story makes a huge difference.

Set Daily Accomplishments & “Just Do the First Small Part”

Big tasks can feel impossible when your brain is heavy. I have learned to break them down. Dishes? Just empty the clean ones first. Prayer time? Just hit play on one worship song. Walk? Commit to ten minutes. This is also where phone scrolling becomes a problem. It gives quick dopamine hits that leave me emptier. Creating something, even small steps, gives a much healthier kind of satisfaction.

Part 3 – Boundaries & Protection

Eliminate Highly Emotional Stimulating Music

Highly emotional music like EDM, techno, modern country, hype tracks, and even many contemporary Christian songs can be a serious trigger for me. These songs are made to stir up strong feelings and give you a rush. For someone with bipolar that rush can feed hypomania and push things out of control.

I used to love EDM while working. It felt motivating and exciting. When I finally cut it out, at first I felt a strange emptiness or boredom. That loss itself was a clear sign. I had been using the music to chase those hypo-mania highs that feel so good but cost so much when they spin out. At first you miss the excitement, but then you start to appreciate the calm and peace that takes its place. The trade-off is worth it.

No Alcohol / No Nicotine

In North Dakota drinking is just part of the culture. Everywhere you look there are ads, hockey tournaments, lake weekends. It all revolves around alcohol. I grew up in that world. But I had to be honest with myself. Even small amounts of alcohol throw my moods off balance. It can push me toward hypomania with that false sense of relaxation and confidence at first, but then it often leads to a deeper depression crash afterward. Alcohol messes with sleep and brain chemistry in ways that make cycling more likely. Nicotine is a stimulant for me, and stimulants can easily push me into hypomania. For me the only choice is removing it entirely because even a couple of drinks or a little nicotine can start the fire that begins the cycles.

Set Shopping & Financial Limits

This was a hard but necessary step. I handed finances over to Alyssa. I use a credit card that can be locked down quickly, and we have the credit agencies locked so I cannot open new lines during an episode. When my brain chemistry falls apart, my decisions are not what they normally would be. Making this change has protected our family from a lot of damage. It was not about trust. It was about being honest about the disease and protecting the people I love.

Grace & Forgiveness for Yourself

Grace is something I need every single day. You will make mistakes. You will have setbacks. When that happens, speak kindly to yourself. Shame makes everything worse. I remind myself that I am not defined by my worst moments. God's grace covers me even when I feel like I don't deserve it. Forgiving yourself is not letting yourself off the hook. It is choosing to get back up and keep walking.

Mental Fatigue – What it really feels like and how to handle it

Mental fatigue is hard for other people to understand. It is like sitting through a difficult class where you are trying your hardest to concentrate the entire time, but your brain still only catches about twenty-five percent of what is being said. Decisions feel heavy. Comprehension is slow. Working memory is foggy.

When it hits, I use small steps, priority lists, and AI tools to help capture ideas and organize them. I also give myself permission to operate in vibe flow, doing what I can when I can, without beating myself up. Resting when needed is not quitting. It is wisdom.

Stress Management

Keeping stress as low as possible is critical. Stress is one of the biggest triggers for cycling. I have learned to say no more often, protect my schedule, and create margin in my days. When I feel stress building, I go for a walk, pray, talk with Alyssa or Terry, or do something simple with the kids. The goal is not to live a stress-free life. That is impossible. But we can keep it from getting so high that it pushes me into a cycle. Small daily choices here protect everything else.

Part 4 – Deeper Resilience

Spiritual Growth & Anchoring When Your Thoughts Can't Be Trusted

There are times when my own thoughts become loud and unreliable. That is when I need something outside of myself to hold on to. A daily habit of reading Proverbs and Psalms has been a strong anchor for me. Even when my mind is spinning or lying to me, these words bring truth and calm. Prayer, worship, and leaning on God's promises remind me that I am not alone and that my identity is not defined by my worst episodes. Faith does not remove the struggle, but it gives me strength to keep going and a deeper joy that the ups and downs cannot take away.

Protecting Your Family

One of the strongest reasons to manage this well is the people I love. The instability, impulsive spending, late-night arguments, and emotional ups and downs hurt my wife and kids. I have had to learn that protecting them sometimes means stepping away for a short time if a cycle is getting strong. Handing over finances to Alyssa was one of the biggest ways I could love my family. Small daily stability adds up to a safer and more peaceful home.

You Will Always Need Medication and Maintenance

I wish it were not true, but for me medication and ongoing maintenance are lifelong. I have tried going without or letting routines slip. The pain and consequences were unbearable. If you have not had enough pain yet, you might be tempted to test the limits. I understand that. But the sooner you accept that consistent treatment is necessary, the sooner you can start building a better life.

Bipolar Medical Research Update

The field is moving fast. Large studies like the BD² project and ENIGMA brain imaging research are helping us understand different biotypes, inflammation, and brain circuitry in bipolar disorder. These advances point toward more personalized approaches in the future. This is hopeful, but it also reminds us how complex the condition is. Stay in touch with your provider about new developments, but always test them against what actually works in your own life.

You Cannot Trust Your Own Thoughts in Cycles

This was a hard lesson. In the middle of a cycle my mind can tell me all kinds of things that feel completely true in the moment. Jealous thoughts, grandiose plans, deep shame, or paranoia can feel 100 percent real. I have learned to pause, talk things through with Alyssa or Terry, and check them against what I know when I am stable. God's truth and the input of trusted people are lifelines when my own thinking cannot be trusted.

Closing Encouragement

You have already taken a big step by picking up this book. Managing bipolar is not easy, but it is possible to live a good life with it. Some days will be harder than others. Give yourself grace on those days. Keep showing up. Keep reaching out to your provider, your support people, and to God. The pain you have walked through does not have to define your future. It can become part of your story that helps someone else find hope.

Never lose hope. Real progress is made in the small, faithful steps. You are not alone in this.

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Commitment Page

I _____ (your name) choose to do my best to follow the practical steps in this guide for my future self.

I understand that setbacks will come, and I will give myself grace and get back up.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Name: _____ Date started: _____

2 week-day stability tracker to help you turn these ideas into daily habits.

Habit	D1	D2	D3	D4	D5	D6	D7	D8	D9	D10	D11	D12	D13	D14
Read a Proverbs & Psalms														
Prayer														
No Alcohol, Nicotine														
No Social Media														
Daily Walking														
Good Sleep														
Healthy Eating														

2 Week Reflection

What went well this?

What was difficult?

One thing I want to improve next the 2 weeks:
