

God Doesn't Want YOU to Crash and Burn

Americans today—including many Christians—are destroying their lives with stress, unforgiveness and other dangerous emotions. Here's how you can avoid an emotional breakdown.

Many believers live in a prison of unresolved emotional issues, not realizing the price they will ultimately be required to pay because of their failure to deal with the poisonous emotions holding them captive. Negative emotions such as anger, envy and bitterness—as well as the mishandling of stress—can destroy one's health and life. Studies have shown, in fact, that anxious thoughts cause our bodies to release chemicals that actually suppress our immune systems.

That is why the Bible tells us to renew our minds and to fix our thoughts on what is true, honorable and right: “Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things” (Phil. 4:8, NKJV).

You must consciously monitor your thoughts on a daily basis. When you are first regaining your emotional health, it may take minute-to-minute monitoring until you get control. But the Lord heals today, just as He did in the past: “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Heb. 13:8).

So it follows that we can be healed of our past, be set free in the present, and be all that we can be in the future. In other words: You can become whole, healed and free; you can experience life as God intended it to be.

You must, however, have the willingness and the desire to do so. You must do the work. It will not be easy. It may, in fact, be the most difficult task you have ever undertaken.

Looking deep within yourself takes a lot of courage. But that is where the Holy Spirit comes in and holds you up as you go deep within. With God's help, the process is accelerated. That is why prayer and a close walk with Him are imperative.

In order to appropriately deal with the emotional baggage holding us back, we need to recognize dangerous emotions and understand how they work. And we must make a conscious choice to ban the cluttered thought processes in our minds that lead to stress and breakdown.

Toxic Emotions

The dangerous emotions we must guard against are prolific and include jealousy, pride, envy, anger and bitterness. It is important to understand what plays into each one of these emotions.

Low self-esteem and the absence of unconditional love are often at the root of jealousy. Jealousy is a very destructive emotion because it is self-defeating. You can feel jealous only when you believe someone or something else has or is doing, being or withholding something you desire.

Jealousy is founded on the false idea that God has supplied only a limited amount of love or good in this world. If you believe this, you will become jealous of those who receive

more than you do of what you desire. The truth is that God gives you abundance, which is yours just by asking Him in faith.

When you learn to love yourself unconditionally, your self-esteem and confidence become impregnable. You will realize there is nothing to be jealous about. You will be able to accept and love others without fear or envy. "Perfect love casts out fear" (1 John 4:18).

When you see a friend or acquaintance achieve or acquire something wonderful in life, be happy and thankful for them. Any feelings of jealousy will only hurt you and retard your progress.

Pride is another toxic emotion often caused by low self-esteem. Low self-esteem also produces envy, anger, prejudice, resentment and arrogance. These personality traits may be labeled as pride, but in fact they are pride turned inside out. Any exercise in false pride may harm another and always hurts the person misusing his or her proud nature.

False pride is usually born out of fear, self-doubt and anger. The person becomes heavily burdened with fear and self-doubt and angrily rebels against these traits by adopting a superior attitude.

True self-confidence is a healthy mixture of faith, self-control, compassion, achievement, purpose and love. As you learn to see yourself as a child of God, you cannot help but be self-confident of all that you are in Him and all that you are becoming through His help.

Many people struggle with envy, which is typically associated with low self-esteem and an unforgiving, resentful nature. Envy and resentment can keep you trapped in a life that prevents you from God's abundance. The surest way to become poor in spirit and in your pocketbook is to be envious of others.

Envy is an enemy to success in life and causes a multitude of problems, most of them to the person who is envious. Building your self-confidence daily will gradually replace all of the life-destroying effects that envy brings on your mind, body and spirit.

God made you a very special and unique expression of Him. No one else is just like you. You are valuable to God. Therefore, there is no reason for you to be envious of anyone or anything—because you have it all.

One of the most dangerous of all emotions is anger. When anger is not dealt with immediately, it festers in our souls, causing pain, isolation and eventually physical disease. That is why the Bible says not to “let the sun go down on your wrath” (Eph. 4:26).

Warning signs of anger include low self-esteem; an inability to get close to people; being overly critical, controlling or confrontational; lacking in trust; blaming others for mistakes; and overreacting.

An example from nature helps to illustrate the danger of unresolved anger. If a tree is hit with lightning, it may survive unharmed. But it may also suffer damage ranging from minor to severe.

If a rain-drenched tree is hit by lightning, chances are it will not be injured because the moisture on the outside of the tree will conduct the lightning along the outside to the ground. On the other hand, if the tree is dry and has a wet, dead area inside the trunk, it could literally explode—slinging branches and propelling pieces of wood as far as 100 feet. This happens because the lightning travels rapidly down the moist interior of the tree, heating it to a very high temperature in thousandths of a second.

This is a good illustration of the explosiveness of a fiery temper. When you begin to boil inside, harm will come to you. That is why the psalmist said, “Cease from anger, and forsake wrath; do not fret—it only causes harm” (Ps. 37:8). As in the case of the tree blazing inside, “‘Wrath kills a foolish man’” (Job 5:2).

The Greek root for the word wrath means “to sacrifice, kill, slaughter.” Like lightning traversing the inside of a tree, wrath can boil up inside a person in an instant and even bring about death. Like the tree in which the lightning travels, a person filled with wrath or anger is apt to explode. The Bible puts it this way: “Anger rests in the bosom of fools” (Eccl. 7:9).

If anger is not dealt with, bitterness sets in. You can choose to hold on to your hurt or pain and grow increasingly bitter, or you can deal with it, release it and feel better.

I have a close friend who dramatically illustrates this. He and his sister lived in the same home growing up. Both of them were the products of their parents’ divorce. His sister slowly became bitter over the course of her life. She assumed the victim role early on, and the victim she certainly became.

She was an angry child and teen. In adulthood, her anger, resentment and blaming nature paralyzed her life so much that she turned to drugs and alcohol. Although she overcame her drug and alcohol habit, she is still unable to form lasting and meaningful relationships.

The difference for you will be how you choose to react. Long ago I chose to be a survivor. I experienced loss, but I forgave, released and loved. Today I am truly grateful because I am better for it.

The Power of Forgiveness

I have learned that many of our hurts and much of our emotional pain is made worse when we believe that others deliberately wronged us. In some cases, it may be true. But in most cases, people are so busy with their own lives that they simply have no time to purposely cause hurt and pain to others. Much of the emotional pain we experience is unintentionally inflicted upon us.

The path to healing is forgiveness. Forgiveness short-circuits a cascade of stress hormones that can cause accelerated heart rate, shut down your immune system and encourage blood clotting. Conversely, unforgiveness and holding on to anger increase your chance of a heart attack fivefold. They also increase your risk of cancer, high blood pressure, high cholesterol and a host of chronic diseases.

But forgiveness is a conscious choice. You must choose to give up your feelings of unforgiveness and anger. Although anger and resentment are perfectly natural responses to situations

that hurt or upset you, it is not worth running the risk of letting negative experiences affect your attitude about people or life in general. If you do, you will be open to emotional health robbers such as anxiety, depression, poor self-esteem and staying in the victim role.

Forgiving is not necessarily forgetting. It is unrealistic to think that you can forget about an injustice, hurt or wound inflicted upon you by someone you love. You do have a memory, and the memory will always be with you.

Forgiving is letting go of the anger and hurt attached to it and moving on with your life. Forgiving results in better sleep, increased feelings of love, more ability to trust and the eradication of physical symptoms that are connected to anger or unforgiveness.

Life is always moving forward; it does not stop and look back. It moves forward at a steady pace, and in doing so, it gives us new opportunities to put into use what was learned from past mistakes. Every day is a new beginning—another chance to live in forgiveness, unconditional love and truth.

The power of love can heal us of the dangerous emotions that threaten to destroy our lives and our health. It is your choice. When you let go of dangerous emotions, you are then free to experience pure love. You will also be able to receive love and give love without fear.

You will experience a peaceful trust that will replace the mistrust that has held you captive. You will feel more relaxed and at peace in your relationships with your friends, family and loved ones. Once you are free to accept and to give love,

you will begin to allow this love to flow out of you and into the lives of everyone you come in contact with.

This is actually the way God made us to be. We thrive mentally, physically and spiritually when we develop a lifestyle of loving people unconditionally. Everyone desires love and needs to be loved. You will be amazed at the transformation that takes place in your life. People will be drawn to you.

Love is a balm that produces healing and change. This is because love is unconditional giving. Love is the healing emotion that cancels out all dangerous ones and eliminates fear. Love can set you free from your prison of toxic emotions.

Mastering Your Emotions

Learning what the Bible says about dealing with toxic emotions can put you on the path to overcoming them.

Anger and Bitterness:

“A fool vents all his feelings, but a wise man holds them back” (Prov. 29:11, NKJV).

“He who is often rebuked, and hardens his neck, will suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy” (Prov. 29:1).

“So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath” (James 1:19).

“Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled” (Heb. 12:14-15).

Anxiety:

“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:6-7).

“Anxiety in the heart of man causes depression, but a good word makes it glad” (Prov. 12:25).

“Casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you” (1 Pet. 5:7).

“‘Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest’” (Matt. 11:28).

Fear:

“The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?” (Ps. 27:1).

“‘Are not five sparrows sold for two copper coins? And not one of them is forgotten before God. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows'” (Luke 12:6-7).

“For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind” (2 Tim. 1:7).

“There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love” (1 John 4:18).

Unforgiveness:

“‘Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors'” (Matt. 6:12).

“‘For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses'” (Matt. 6:14-15).

“Then Peter came to [Jesus] and said, ‘Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?’ Jesus said to him, ‘I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven'” (Matt. 18:21-22).

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