

charis



Building Emotional Resilience



Charis is an Urban Alliance initiative. www.urbanalliance.com

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About Charis

Urban Alliance works with churches and ministry organizations to help them communicate about mental health in ways that offer hope and create safe environments where people feel comfortable seeking help.

Many people who are struggling with their relational, emotional and mental health do not receive the support they need. They often do not know where to turn for help, or are embarrassed to acknowledge they are struggling. Additionally, a lack of resources in the community, poverty and stigma may keep people from receiving help.

Research shows that the church is one of the most common places people go to seek help when they are struggling emotionally. This is why it is so important for pastors and care providers to be equipped to offer care and connect people to appropriate help. Many churches offer support groups, care ministries or pastoral care. And, professional counselors who offer care from a Christian perspective provide services in the community.

Urban Alliance works with churches and organizations to help them communicate about mental health in ways that offer hope and create safe environments where people feel comfortable seeking help. Urban Alliance also equips care providers to respond sensitively, effectively connect people who are seeking care to appropriate support, and provide care, so they may cope well and heal.

The Charis website is a tool, managed by Urban Alliance, that can be used by individuals and organizations to help connect people in need of support to high-quality professional counselors, support groups and specialized support services offered from a Christian perspective.

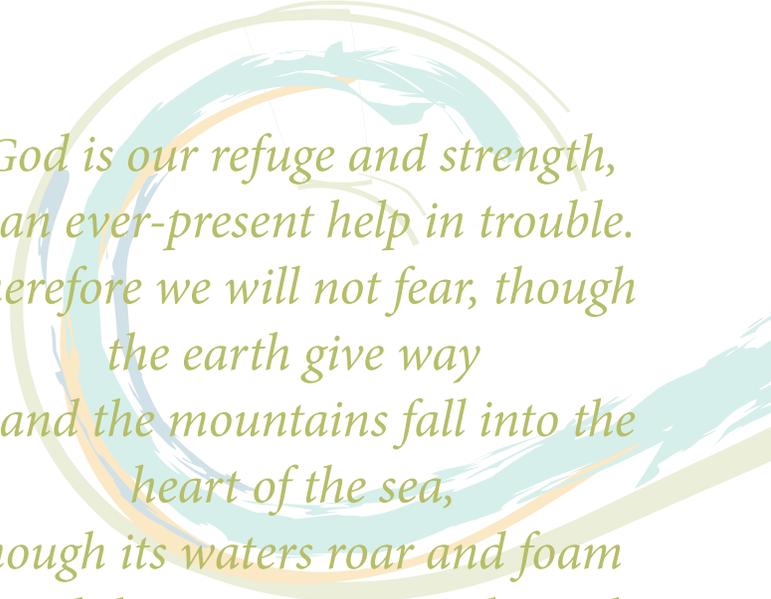
These collaborative efforts have helped hundreds of people overcome barriers and more effectively cope, have ongoing support, strengthen their relationships, experience hope, joy and peace, and persevere despite life's challenges.

To learn more about Charis, visit www.urbanalliance.com/charis.

To visit the Charis website, visit www.charisnetworkct.org.

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*“God is our refuge and strength,
an ever-present help in trouble.
Therefore we will not fear, though
the earth give way
and the mountains fall into the
heart of the sea,
though its waters roar and foam
and the mountains quake with
their surging.*

*There is a river whose streams
make glad the city of God,
the holy place where the Most
High dwells.*

*God is within her, she will not
fall; God will help her at break
of day. Nations are in uproar,
kingdoms fall;
he lifts his voice, the earth
melts. The Lord Almighty is
with us; the God of Jacob is our
fortress.”*

Psalm 46 1-7

Building Emotional Resilience: *Introduction*

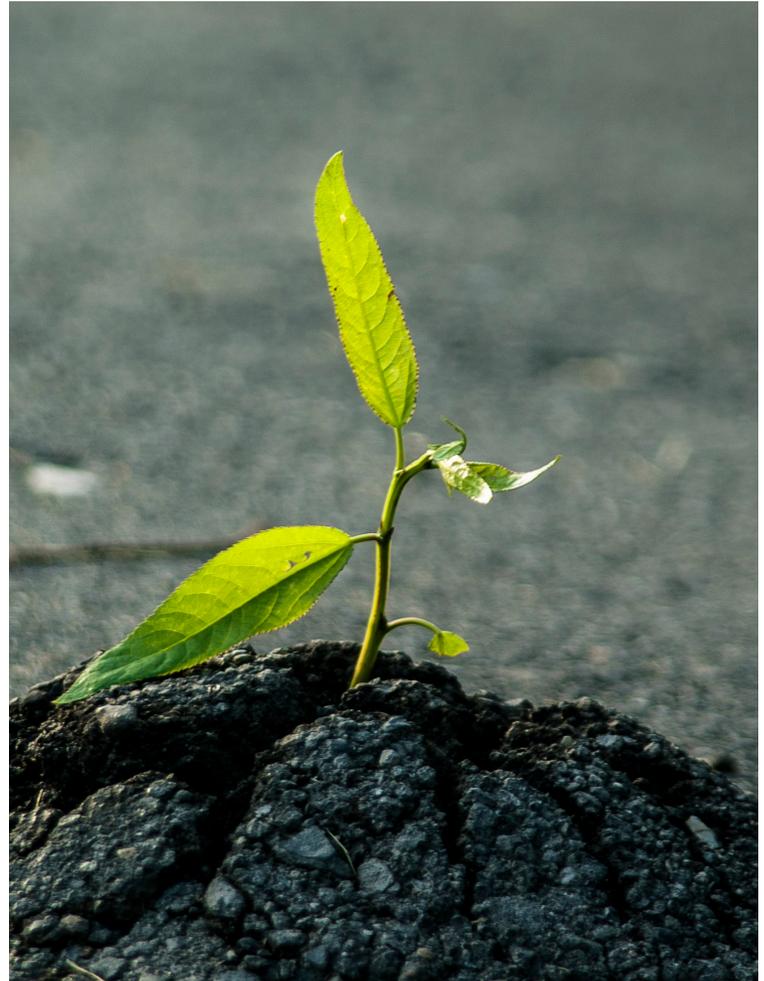
Today more than ever, it is important for all people to learn to be resilient. Resilience is the ability to cope, adjust, and even grow in the midst of adversity.

A Rubber Band as a Metaphor

Some people use the metaphor of a rubber band to describe resilience. Rubber bands, like people, come in different sizes and are stretched in different ways. They also have different thicknesses and abilities to stretch shorter or longer. Resilience requires flexibility and adaptability, similar to a stretched rubber band. The modern rubber band goes through a process called vulcanization. This gives the rubber durability when stretched and the flexibility to snap back. With normal use and proper care, the rubber band will stretch and flex, but is able to return to its original state. In the same way people can expect to be stretched through the trials of life. By building resilience skills, people have an increased capacity to cope and adjust in healthy ways, and even grow through difficult experiences.

The Wise and Foolish Builder

The Bible uses the parable of the wise and foolish builders in Matthew 7:24 to illustrate resilience. In this parable there are two men: one who builds his house on a rock and another who builds his house on the sand. When a storm comes, the house built on the sand “*comes crashing down*,” but the house built on the rock stands. The rock represents Jesus and the storm represents the trials of life. When a person’s life is built on Jesus, they are resilient. However, building one’s life on the rock requires more than just professing faith and attending church. It requires bringing all aspects of oneself (e.g. thoughts, feelings, behaviors) into alignment with God’s truth.



Storms in Life

We know from scripture that all people will face storms. James 1:2-4 says, “*Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.*” We see from this verse that trials or difficult situations should not surprise us. In fact, God actually uses them to increase our capacity to persevere. When a person perseveres, it means they keep going even when the situation is hard.

Perseverance

A good example of perseverance is an athlete practicing a sport. Most athletes endure strenuous practice routines to prepare for a competition. At first, the routine is very hard and the athlete may get tired quickly. However, by the end of the season, if the athlete practiced regularly, the routine is not as challenging and they can physically do more than they could at the beginning of the season. In the same way, persevering through difficult life situations results in an increased resilience. The process of learning to persevere transforms us in powerful ways. In James it says, perseverance makes us “*mature and complete, not lacking anything.*” By persevering, people can become more like Jesus.

However, trials do not automatically result in a person becoming more like Jesus. In order for that to happen, they need to cooperate with God in the process and build healthy coping into their lives so perseverance results in positive transformation. While adversity has the potential to help people grow, it also has the potential to result in unhealthy coping and maladaptive behavior.

The set of handouts associated with this introduction offers practical suggestions for habits a person can build into their day-to-day life that will help them to cope effectively and be more resilient when life presents unexpected challenges.

“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock.”

Matthew 7: 24-27

Resilience Skills

The following “Resilience Skills” are included as a set of handouts. Each can be thought of as a stand-alone skill. People who regularly practice multiple resilience skills are better prepared to cope with stressful situations.

- ✓ **Understanding Emotions:** Labeling emotions and being aware of how your body experiences them
- ✓ **Managing Emotions:** Practicing activities that ease distressing emotions
- ✓ **Processing Change:** Grieving losses; both big and small
- ✓ **Taking Thoughts Captive:** Identifying and replacing thoughts that do not align with God's truth
- ✓ **Being Thankful:** Maintaining an attitude of gratefulness in all circumstances
- ✓ **Caring for your Body:** Becoming aware of your body's needs and responding
- ✓ **Being Present:** Learning to be still and attend to the present moment
- ✓ **Seeking God's Presence:** Regularly spending time with God and allowing Him to transform your heart
- ✓ **Building a Support Network:** Engaging with other people and asking for help when you need it
- ✓ **Helping Others:** Using your gifts, skills, and abilities to help other people

Building Emotional Resilience: *Understanding Emotions*



Emotional intelligence is the capacity to understand, control, and express one's emotions in healthy ways.

Without emotional intelligence it is very difficult to have healthy relationships with others and cope with challenging situations.¹ An important part of emotional intelligence is being aware of your emotions and how your body experiences them. God created people with a tremendous variety of emotions. There are many scriptures that address different emotions. And God is a good Father who wants to help His children manage their feelings in healthy ways:

Anxiety: *"Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which*

transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:6-7).

God knows that at times His children feel anxious and fearful, and He wants to help by giving His peace.

Anger: *"In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold."* (Ephesians 4:26-27) God knows that when His children don't manage feelings of anger in healthy ways, it can harm them and leave them vulnerable to the enemy. So, He warns them to resolve conflicts quickly.

Grief and Sadness: *"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted."* (Matthew 5:4)

God knows His children will experience loss and grief, and He's near and ready to offer comfort.

Labeling Emotions

An important first step in developing emotional intelligence is the ability to pause and label emotions. While this may sound simple, it is often very challenging. Just about everyone can think of a time when they reacted based on their emotions and ended up saying or doing things they regretted.

When labeling emotions, it is important to consider the following question:

- What emotion am I feeling? (and give a specific name to the emotion)

Intensity of the Emotion

We have the capacity to experience the same emotion very differently. Consider anger; a person can feel mildly irritated, angry, or enraged. Each emotion has different levels of intensity.

After an emotion has been labeled the person might consider:

- How intensely am I feeling it?

It is often helpful to consider the intensity using a 1-10 scale with a 1 being very low intensity and a 10 being very high intensity. By using a scale, a person can select the number on the scale that best describes how intensely they are feeling the emotion. For example, consider the disciples with Jesus in the storm; they likely felt fear and felt it very intensely (maybe 8-10). Or, consider the last time someone interrupted you; perhaps you felt moderately frustrated (maybe a 3-5). Practice this a few times each day. Pause, consider what emotion you are feeling, and how intensely you are feeling it.

Experience of Emotion

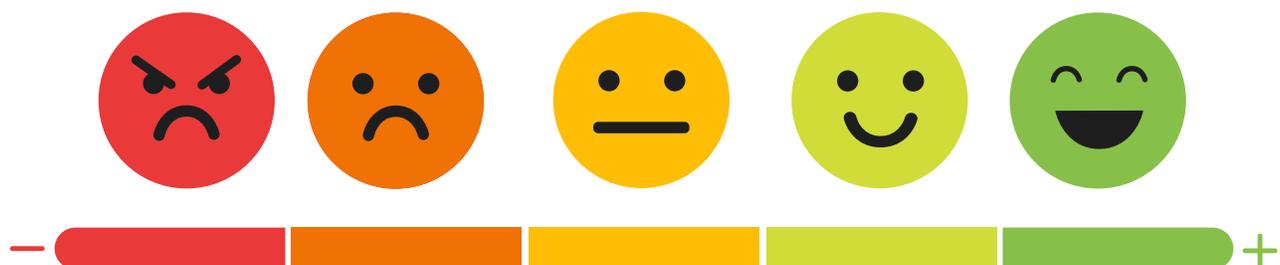
It is also helpful for people to become aware of their experiences of different emotions at different intensities. If there is an emotion a person feels frequently, they might consider their experience of that emotion at different levels of intensity.

For example, if a person feels a lot of anger, they might consider what anger is like for them at a 1, 3, 5, 7, and 10. By becoming more aware of the thoughts, feelings, and sensations associated with an emotion, a person becomes more aware when they start to feel it and in time is better able to manage it.

Pick an emotion and consider how you experience it at intensities of 1, 5, and 10. Consider the questions:

- What does my body feel physically? Which parts are impacted by the emotion?
- What am I thinking?
- Where in my body do I feel the emotion? What words describe how it feels?

There is a strong connection between emotional intelligence and maturity. As a person is better able to understand and respond to their own emotions in a healthy way, they have an increased capacity to love others and live out the greatest commandments, *“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind”* and *“Love your neighbor as yourself.”* (Matthew 22: 37-39)



Building Emotional Resilience: *Managing Emotions*

Some emotions are intense and overwhelming.

Everyone can think of a time when they felt so upset that they did not know what to do. The ability to calm down and regulate distressing emotions is critical. When people do not learn to be aware of their feelings, calm themselves, and think before acting, they cause problems for themselves and others.

People in the Bible with Strong Emotions

There are many people in the Bible who experienced overwhelming emotions. The Psalms are full of passionate cries out to God in times of distress. For example, in Psalm 42 the psalmist says, *“My tears have been my food day and night, while people say to me all day long, ‘Where is your God?’”* and *“Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me?”*

In 1 Samuel 1:10 it says, *“In her deep anguish Hannah prayed to the LORD, weeping bitterly.”* This verse paints a picture of woman grieving her barrenness. And, in 1 Kings 19, the prophet Elijah fled to Horeb at the news that Jezebel killed the other prophets and when he arrived was so distressed that he told God he wished to die. It is not uncommon for people to struggle to cope with strong feelings, especially in difficult situations. That is why building skills to manage them is very important.

Learning to Control Emotions

The ability to sooth difficult emotions is learned early in life in parent-child relationships. Consider newborn babies. When they cry, the adults in their life pick them up and offer comfort.²

It is in the context of these early relationships that babies learn to receive comfort and begin developing skills to sooth overwhelming emotions. These skills become more complex and independent as the child grows.



Some parents struggle to know when their children need help with their emotions and how to respond sensitively. This is often because they had parents who did not know how to do this.³

One of the reasons a person may struggle to cope with distressing emotions, is that their parents struggled in this area also. Another, is simply biology. Some people have genes that cause them to have more intense emotions and a harder time soothing themselves.⁴ For others, chronic stress or trauma causes them to have intense emotions that are difficult to calm.⁵

The good news is that over time these skills can be learned and supported by mature friends and family.

God Wants to Help

God wants to help people with their emotions. 1 Peter 5:7 says, “Cast all your anxiety [or cares] on Him because He cares for you”. The word cast means to throw upon. Think of the disciples casting or throwing their nets off their boat and into the water. God cares about each person’s emotions and invites them to cast their anxieties (whatever is causing distress) onto Him.

In Psalm 142 David says to God, “I cry aloud to the Lord; I lift up my voice to the LORD for mercy. I pour out before him my complaint; before him I tell my trouble.” The expression used here “pour out my complaint” is similar to “cast your cares.” In both cases, a person gives to God their distress and allows Him to help. So, the first step in managing overwhelming emotions is inviting Jesus to help and sharing the distress with Him.

Tools to Calm Overwhelming Feelings

Metaphorically, it is helpful to have a toolbox of strategies that can be used to calm overwhelming emotions. There are many different tools in a toolbox, and the right one is selected for each job. In the same way, a person may have various strategies to cope and can select the best one for the specific situation. And, if one does not work, they can try another.

Journal. Try writing out your thoughts and feelings in a journal. For some people it helps to keep the journal entries and for others it helps to tear up the paper and throw it away.

Exercise. Exercise is a great way to release emotions. Go for a run, take a trip to the gym, do push-ups or crunches in your bedroom. Wherever you are, there are ways to exert physical energy through exercise.

Listen to music. Play a song that brings comfort or helps you to express an emotion. Be careful to select a song that will help you work through your emotions and not exacerbate them.

Pray. Find a quiet place and share all of your thoughts and feelings with God. Invite Him into the situation to help.

Talk it out. Choose a friend who is mature and give them a call to talk through the situation. Try to pick a person who will offer wisdom and not just agree with your perspective. If coping with emotions is challenging for you, you might consider meeting with a counselor who can help you.

Enjoy nature. Try going outside and noticing the beauty of creation. See if you can find something you haven’t noticed before.

Snuggle with a pet. If you have an affectionate pet, spend some time snuggling. Pets can bring joy and calm.

Watch a movie. Movies and TV can offer a distraction. While it is not healthy to always choose distraction to manage emotions, it is okay some of the time. Make sure to choose healthy and positive programming.

Make something. Doing something with your hands can be a helpful way to calm down. Make a craft, cook a meal, or express your emotions through art.

Building Emotional Resilience: *Processing Change*

Things are changing all of the time. Sometimes changes in life are exciting, such as the birth of a new child, a marriage, or moving on to a new grade in school. Other times there are changes that are unwanted such as losing a job, a new health condition, or the death of a loved one. Anytime there is change in life, whether wanted or unwanted, a person experiences loss.

Loss

Loss is defined as being deprived of something or someone. When a baby is born the new parents lose things such as sleep, time alone together, and their old routine. When a child moves to a new grade in school, they lose their old teacher, classmates, and the familiarity of the classroom they enjoyed the previous year. And, of course, in death proximity to a loved one is lost. People are constantly experiencing loss and all too often do not realize it.

Grief is a normal and natural emotional reaction to loss or change of any kind. According to H. Norman Wright (2006), through grief a person expresses their feelings about the loss, protests the loss, and expresses how they are affected by the impact of the loss.⁶ Often when losses are not acknowledged, they are not grieved. And, it is very hard to process loss in a healthy way without grieving.

God of Comfort

Fortunately, God sees each loss in a person's life and wants to help them. 2 Corinthians 1: 3-4 says,



“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.” Each time a person experiences a loss, God is near and ready to offer His comfort.

Further, after a person has experienced God's comfort they are then used by God to comfort others who are struggling. Comfort is like balm that eases pain and distress. It is God's plan that people receive comfort from God and each other to cope with loss.

Tasks of Grief

Worden (2009) suggests that there are four tasks one must accomplish for “the process of grieving to be completed” and “equilibrium to be reestablished.” These tasks can occur in any order and people may need to revisit tasks over time. They create the acronym TEAR.⁷

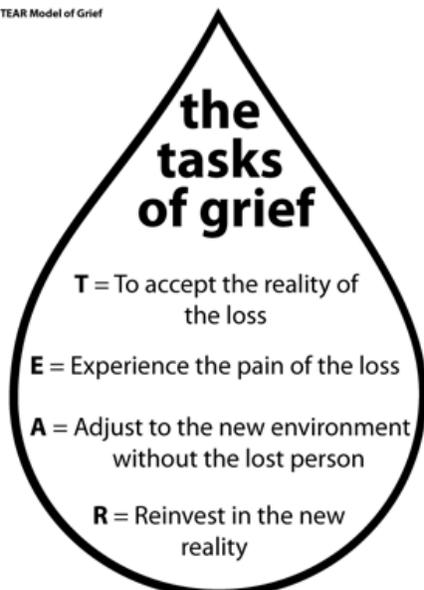
Task #1: To accept the reality of the loss. There are basic ways a person can accept the reality of a loss such as verbally acknowledging that it is occurring, planning a funeral or memorial, or beginning to speak about the person (or whatever was lost) in the past tense.

Task #2: Experience the pain of grief. Each loss will require a person to work through many different emotions. From sadness, fear, loneliness, despair, hopelessness, and anger to guilt, blame, relief, and countless others, there are many emotions a person may experience. It is important to acknowledge, talk about, and understand these complex emotions, and look to God for comfort and help through the process.

Task #3: Aadjust to an environment without the person (or whatever was lost). This task can mean very different things to different people depending on the relationship to the person who has died (or whatever was lost), as well as the roles that are impacted by the loss. When the loss is the death of a loved one, it may take a significant period of time just to realize the different roles their loved one played or make adjustments that are required, such as paying bills, living alone, being a single parent, cooking meals, or taking care of the home.

Task #4: Rinvest in a new reality. This final task involves finding an appropriate, ongoing connection in our emotional lives with the person who has died (or whatever was lost), while continuing to live life in the present without them. This often means allowing for thoughts and memories, while beginning to meaningfully engage with people or things that bring pleasure.

TEAR Model of Grief



“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.”

2 Corinthians 1: 3-4

Building Emotional Resilience: *Taking Thoughts Captive*

Emotional intelligence is the capacity to understand, control, and express one's emotions in healthy ways. An important skill that increases emotional intelligence is the ability to see the connection between experiences, thoughts, and emotions. The field of psychology offers a model known as cognitive behavioral therapy that suggests a person's beliefs about their situation dramatically impacts their emotions, which in turn impacts their behaviors.⁸

According to this model, if a person can identify and change their thinking, their emotions and behaviors will shift as well. That is why two people can experience very similar situations, but have very different emotions, responses, and reactions. An excellent example of this is found in the story of David and Goliath (1 Samuel 17).

David and Goliath

In this story, the nation of Israel was called to fight the Philistine army. Jesse was a man who had twelve sons. David was the youngest of Jesse's twelve sons and stayed back to tend to the family's sheep while the older sons went to war. A great Philistine giant named Goliath who stood over nine feet tall, came to the front of the Philistine battle line each day for forty days and mocked the Israelites and their God. Goliath called to them to fight, but King Saul and the Israelites were scared and did nothing.

It is at this point in the story that the important role that thoughts and beliefs play in a person's emotions and behaviors becomes evident. David's brothers (and all of the Israelites in the battle) were afraid and did not want to fight. However, when David finds out about Goliath, he has the exact opposite reaction. He felt courage and motivation and volunteered to fight the giant.



This story offers an example of people who have very different emotions and behaviors in reaction to the same situation.

So, what was the difference between David and the rest of the Israelites? The answer is that their thoughts and beliefs about the situation were very different. The Israelites saw the size and strength of Goliath and believed they would be killed if they fought him. They viewed the situation using worldly logic and concluded the giant was too big and strong to be defeated. David saw the giant, but remembered the size and strength of his God. David says, *"The Lord who rescued me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will rescue me from the hand of this Philistine."* (1 Samuel 17:37). His beliefs about the power of his God, gave him courage to fight the giant.

The next time you have a strong emotional reaction to a situation, pause and ask yourself the following questions:

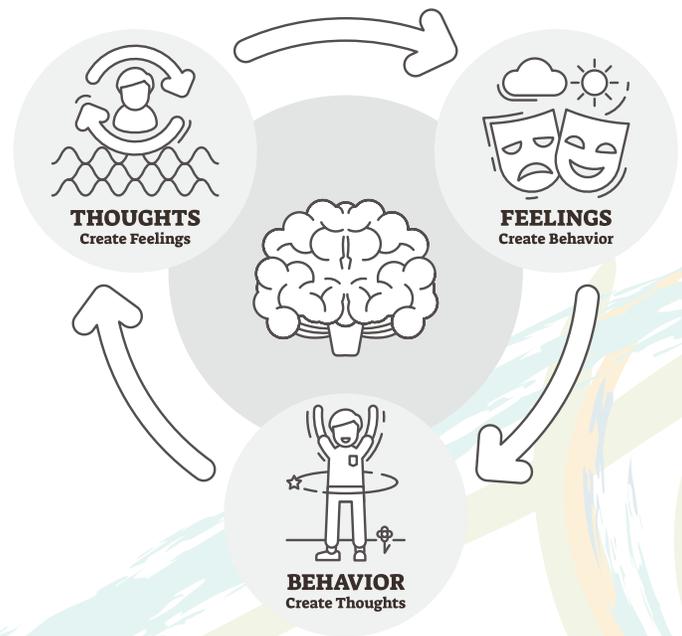
- What situation sparked this emotion?
- What am I feeling? How intensely am I feeling it?
- What are my thoughts and beliefs about this situation?
- How well do my thoughts align with the truth contained in God's Word?
- If it does not align, what truth can it be replaced with?

It is always important for believers to become more aware of their thoughts, especially when their thoughts do not align with the Word of God. 2 Corinthians 10:5 says, "We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ." Hebrews 4:12 says, "For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."

These verses suggest that all believers must be aware of their thoughts and compare them to the truth contained in the Word of God. When thoughts do not align with God's Word, they must be "taken captive." This literally means to imprison, confine, or take control of. And, once a lie has been confined, it can more easily be replaced with a thought or belief that aligns with God's truth.

CBT

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy



Core Beliefs

Core beliefs are enduring beliefs about oneself, others, or the world that usually originate in early childhood. As a person becomes more aware of their thoughts, they find patterns in their thinking that reflect core beliefs. Core beliefs often surface across various situations.⁹

Core beliefs can be healthy, for example, "God loves me" or "I can trust close friends to care for me." Or they can be unhealthy, such as, "I am not worthy of love" or "I can't trust anyone." Core beliefs are like a lens that filters how a person makes sense of their experiences.

When a person finds they have core beliefs that do not align with scripture, it is very important to replace them with beliefs that reflect God's truth. Sometimes it is hard to do this alone. Some people find it helpful to share unhealthy core beliefs with mature friends who can offer encouragement and remind them of the truth contained in God's Word. Counselors can also help people identify and replace unhealthy core beliefs.

Building Emotional Resilience: *Being Grateful*

The practice of maintaining a grateful heart is a mark of resilience. The definition of the word grateful is to be thankful or appreciative of kindness. The Bible is clear that maintaining a grateful heart is an important discipline.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 says, *“Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”* In this verse the apostle Paul urges believers to rejoice, pray, and be grateful regardless of what is going on around them. It’s not too difficult to feel joy and gratitude when things are going well. However, feeling joy and gratitude during a trial is a whole different thing. How can a person respond to unemployment, sickness, or disappointment with joy and gratefulness?

Give Thanks In All Circumstances

Paul models this for us. After his conversion, Paul spends the rest of his life sharing the Gospel with others. In Philippians 4:11-13 he says, *“...for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.”*

Paul has learned to feel satisfied regardless of his circumstance because Christ gives Him strength. It is this strength from Jesus that supernaturally allows him to feel content even when things are very difficult. On our own, it would be very difficult to *“rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances;”* however, by the power of the Holy Spirit, our hearts are transformed and our perspective changed. This transformation makes it possible for people to maintain a grateful heart.



“...for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.”

Philippians 4:11-13

Benefits of a Grateful Heart

What's more is that research shows that thankfulness is good for us. According to a recent article in Forbes, people who are grateful can enjoy the following benefits ¹⁰:

1. **Gratitude opens the door to more relationships.** According to a 2014 study published in *Emotion*, thanking a new acquaintance makes them more likely to seek an ongoing relationship.¹¹
2. **Gratitude improves physical health.** According to a 2012 study published in *Personality and Individual Differences*, grateful people experience fewer aches and pains and are more likely to take care of their health.¹²
3. **Gratitude improves psychological health.** Research shows that gratitude reduces unhealthy emotions such as envy, bitterness, and resentment and increases well-being.¹³
4. **Gratitude enhances empathy and reduces aggression.** According to a 2012 study at the University of Kentucky, people who were more grateful were less likely to retaliate against others and more likely to respond to others with empathy and sensitivity.¹⁴
5. **Grateful people sleep better.** According to a 2011 study published in *Applied Psychology: Health and Well-Being*, writing down things you are grateful for before bed improves sleep.¹⁵
6. **Gratitude improves self-esteem.** A 2014 study published in the *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology* found that gratitude increased athletes' self-esteem and other studies have shown gratitude reduces social comparison and frees people to be happy for other people's accomplishments.¹⁶
7. **Gratitude increases mental strength.** In addition to overcoming stress, gratitude may play a significant role in helping people overcome crisis and trauma. A 2003 study published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* found that gratitude was a major contributor to resilience following the terrorist attacks on September 11.¹⁷

Cultivating Gratefulness

The following practices can help a person cultivate a grateful heart:

Focus on blessings. Spend a few minutes each day recounting positive things that happened. Consider writing them in a journal. Over time it can help to recount blessings in your life.

Monitor thinking. Philippians 4:8 says, "Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things."

Monitor your thoughts and focus them on things that meet the criteria in this verse.

Express gratitude. Make sure to express gratitude to others. Leave a thank you note, send a text, write a letter or simply say, "thank you!"

Wonderment. Intentionally develop a sense of wonder. Try to notice simple things in the world around you and marvel at them.

Building Emotional Resilience: *Caring for Your Body*



Your Amazing Body

God created people with amazing physical bodies! Even the best scientists and engineers can't come close to replicating its beauty, performance, and complexity.

As a person learns more about the human body, it becomes apparent that it was designed by an exceptionally intelligent and creative mind. In fact, our bodies in some way reflect the image of God Himself. Genesis 1:27 describes the creation of man and says, "So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them."

However, all too often people neglect their bodies. In the church, caring for emotions is discussed far more than caring for one's body. An Internet search for Christian books or articles shows that there are far more resources that help believers to be emotionally healthy than there are to help believers be physically healthy.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 says, "Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore, honor God with your bodies." Our bodies are very important to God and He considers them to be His temple. Therefore, it is important for people to take care of their bodies as a way of honoring God and, very practically, so they are physically able to serve Him.

Caring for Your Body

Additionally, research shows that how a person treats their body impacts their ability to cope with stressful situations. For example, when a person does not sleep enough or eat healthy, balanced meals, they are not able to cope as well in times of stress.¹⁸ In other cases, emotional distress can be caused by a problem with a person's body. For example, when a person's thyroid gland is not working properly, they may feel increased anxiety or depression.¹⁹

Therefore, people are more resilient when they understand their body's needs and respond to those needs. Each body is a little different and so it is important for each person to spend time getting to know their body's needs. Some people need seven hours of sleep each night while others need eight. Some people have chronic health conditions that need to be managed and others don't. The list below offers practical suggestions of ways a person can take care of their body.

“Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore, honor God with your bodies.”
(1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

Ways to Care for Your Body

Sleep. Get adequate rest each night. For most people, this is about eight hours of sleep per night.

Nutrition. Eat healthy, balanced meals each day. Make sure to include a variety of foods from the major food groups: fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low-fat dairy products and lean protein, including beans and other legumes, nuts, and seeds, and healthy fats.

Hydration. Stay hydrated and drink plenty of water. It is usually recommended to drink about 6-8 eight cups of water each day.

Exercise. The guidelines from the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Health and Human Services indicate, that at least 30 minutes of daily physical activity is required to reduce the risk of chronic diseases in adulthood.

Manage Health Conditions. Take care of any chronic health conditions by attending doctor appointments, taking prescriptions regularly, and following doctors' suggestions for a healthy lifestyle.

Attend Routine Exams. Visit a doctor for routine physical appointments. Most doctors recommend exams every one or two years depending on the person's health.

Pay Attention to Pain. When something hurts, something somewhere has gone wrong and your body is trying to tell you that. Visit with a doctor when you feel pain.

Pray for Healing. The Bible tells us to pray for healing when we are sick or experience a problem with our physical body.

Building Emotional Resilience: *Being Present*

The capacity to be fully present is very challenging.

Western culture emphasizes productivity, accomplishing goals, and staying busy. Many families struggle to balance work, household tasks, extracurricular activities, church, and other responsibilities. People often find themselves with more things they feel need to be done than hours to do them.

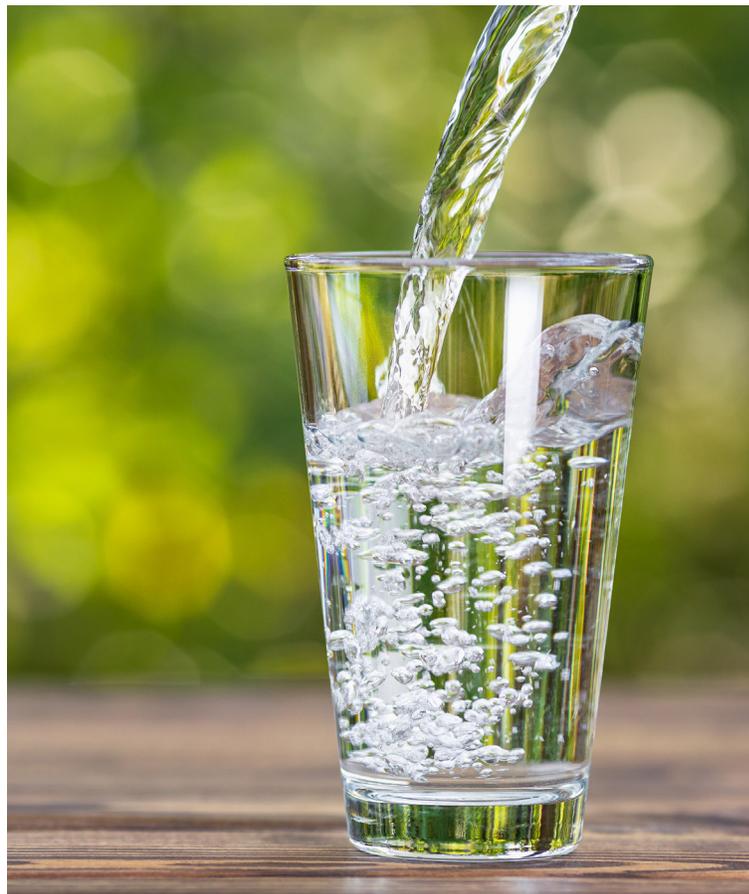
Be Still

Because of this, people often find themselves thinking about the things they just finished or the next thing they will be doing. It can be very difficult to simply enjoy the present moment. In some cases, it is not just thinking about the past or the present, but worrying about what will come next or feeling regret about what has happened.

In Psalm 46:10, God says, *“Be still and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations. I will be exalted among the earth.”* This is an invitation to pause and be still with God in the present moment. We are invited to stop what we are doing and consider the greatness of God. What a gift to us that, at any moment in time, God is with us and invites us to rest in His presence and become more aware of Him.

Slowing Down

Being present is simple in concept, but very challenging to routinely build into day-to-day life. Being present involves engaging with the present moment with each sense and focusing one’s mind solely on what is currently happening. It requires a person to intentionally slow down and notice things they might normally miss. For example, consider the last time you drank a glass of water. Likely, you drank it and did not notice much about the experience.



But drinking a glass of water is a simple activity that engages each of the five senses. Consider the following:

Sight: What did you see while preparing the glass of water? What did the glass look like? Where were you when you were drinking the water? What were you looking at while you drank the water?

Touch: What did the glass feel like as you held it? Did you notice how the water felt in your mouth? What was the temperature of the cup in your hand or water in your mouth?

Hearing: What sounds did you hear as you got the cup out of the cabinet, added ice, filled the cup? What did you hear as you drank the water? Were there background sounds coming from other rooms or outside?

Smell: Did you notice any scents in the room where you prepared the glass of water?

Taste: Were there any tastes in your mouth before drinking the water? How did the water taste as you drank it?

As you can see from this list of questions, a very simple task can engage each of the five senses. As you move through your day, consider how each of your senses can be engaged in day-to-day tasks. The habit of doing so increases your capacity to be present in the moment. Research shows that the ability to slow down and be present is linked to a number of positive emotional and physical health outcomes such as increased positive emotions, decreased anxiety, increased quality of life, and more satisfying relationships.²⁰

*“Be still and know that
I am God. I will be
exalted among the na-
tions. I will be exalted
among the earth.”*

Psalm 46:10

Activities that Help People to Slow Down and Be Present

The following simple activities help people to slow down and be more present. Try to incorporate a couple of these into your day-to-day routine.

Focus on your breathing. Throughout the day take a quick break from what you are doing and breathe. Find a quiet spot, take a deep breath, and close your eyes. Focus on your breath as it moves in and out of your body.

Body scan. Lie on your back with your legs extended and arms at your sides or sit upright in a comfortable chair, palms facing up. Focus your attention slowly and deliberately on each part of your body in order, from toe to head or head to toe. Be aware of any sensations, emotions, or thoughts associated with each part of your body.

Appreciate nature. Choose a natural object from within your immediate environment and focus on it for a minute or two. This could be a flower or an insect, or even the clouds or the moon. Don't do anything except notice the thing you are looking at. Simply relax and notice for as long as your concentration allows. Look at this object as if you were seeing it for the first time and try to notice something you haven't before.

Worship. Play a worship song. First, focus your mind and emotions on the words of the song and their meaning. Then focus your thoughts and emotions solely on God and expressing to Him how much you love Him and how wonderful He is. Remember that He is with you in the present moment.

Check-in with God. Pause and focus your mind on what you are doing in the present moment, how you are feeling, what you are thinking, and any challenges you are facing. Ask God to help you stay connected to the present moment, to be more aware of His presence, and for help with anything that you are struggling with.

Building Emotional Resilience: *Seeking God's Presence*



We are transformed when we spend time in God's presence. By the power of the Holy Spirit a person's mind, emotions, and behaviors come into alignment with God's will and they become more like Him. Being in God's presence and experiencing His love changes everything.

Jesus Transforms Lives

There are numerous examples of people in the Bible who encountered Jesus and were changed. Saul devoted himself to murdering Christians. He encountered Jesus on the road to Damascus and was never the same. After meeting Jesus, he devoted his life to sharing the love of Christ.

Or, consider Zacchaeus, the chief tax collector, who cheated people out of money for his own profit. When Jesus made himself a guest at his home, he was changed and said, *"Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount"* (Luke 19:8).

And, there was Mary Magdalene, a woman afflicted by demons. After Jesus healed her, she devoted her life to following Him and was one of the women Jesus first appeared to after He rose from the dead.

Seeking God

It is clear that God's presence transforms lives, but how do we access His presence? Jeremiah 29:13 says, "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart." God wants people to seek Him. To seek means to search or look for. It involves taking action. This verse assures us that when we look for God with all of our heart, we will find Him. His desire is that all people find Him.

As we seek God and find Him, He fills us with Himself. In Ephesians 3:16-19, the apostle Paul prays the following prayer for the Gentiles, "I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God."

The experience of knowing and being filled with the love of God changes our hearts. This is what Paul, Hannah, and Zacchaeus experienced. Consider praying this very same prayer for yourself.

Taking Action

Seeking requires consistent action. There are many ways to seek God, but generally it will not happen without intentionality and sensitivity to the Holy Spirit.

- **Talk to God.** Express your desire to know Him more and be close to Him. Pray for your heart, that you would hunger for Him, and become more like Him.

- **Respond.** When you feel the Holy Spirit nudging you, respond. This may come in the form of an urge to pray, a thought that comes to mind about God, conviction that you need to read your Bible more often, or simply a reminder of how much God loves you.
- **Worship.** Express your love, affection, wonder, and awe to God in worship. This can be through singing, obedience, taking thoughts captive, or meditating on God's Word. Worship is our response to God's love, mercy, and power.
- **Learn.** Spend time reading and learning God's Word. Hebrews 4:12 says, "For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart." God uses the Bible to transform us.
- **Community.** God desires for His children to be in community with one another. Hebrews 10:24-25 says, "And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching." When believers isolate, they are more vulnerable to spiritual attacks and when they are in community have the opportunity to encourage one another to seek God and grow in their faith.

Building Emotional Resilience: *Building a Support Network*

People are meant to be in close relationships with one another. It is in the context of relationships characterized by warmth, trust, respect, and love that people thrive. And, a strong social support network is critical for getting through stressful life situations.

Importance of Support

Some people have extensive support systems comprised of family, friends, co-workers, etc., while other people struggle to identify one person they trust. We all come from different life situations that offer different amounts of relational support. In fact, there are so many people who struggle to identify a support system that some have called isolation a public health crisis.

The construct of social support has been well researched. Social support buffers people from stress during difficult situations. People with strong support systems are better able to cope during stressful situations, experience less emotional distress, have higher self-esteem, and better physical health.²¹

People without strong support networks are at increased risk for poorer mental and emotional health, poorer self-image, and increased health issues.²² It is clear that having a strong support system has a number of benefits and so it is important for people to assess the degree to which they have social support and cultivate a network of supportive relationships.



Types of Support

There are a number of different ways people can offer support to one another. Five different types of supportive relationships are listed below²³:

- **Emotional:** Expressions of empathy, love, trust, and care, such as listening when a friend is upset or offering encouragement
- **Practical:** Tangible help and service such as providing a meal, helping with a household task, offering childcare, or transportation

- **Informational:** Offering advice, suggestions, or information, such as looking to a medical professional for health information or working with a counselor to improve mental health
- **Appraisal:** Offering information that is useful for self-evaluation, such as pointing out a person's strengths or past successes, or offering wise counsel and perspective on a situation
- **Spiritual:** Offering spiritual guidance and encouraging a person to grow in their faith, such as a pastor, leader at a church, or mature friend

It is important for people to consider the various relationships in their lives and the types of support each offers. This exercise allows a person to see if they have relationships that provide each of the five types of support.

It is in the context of relationships characterized by warmth, trust, respect, and love that people thrive. And, a strong social support network is critical for getting through stressful life situations.

Cultivating Supportive Relationships

While there is not an exact science to building a support system, there are practical things a person can do that will help.

Pray. God knows each person's relational needs. Ask Him to help you build relationships that offer emotional, practical, informational, appraisal, and spiritual support.

Get involved. Get more involved in activities where you can build new relationships. Join a new ministry at a church, take a class, join a gym, volunteer, or participate in a parenting group.

Deepen existing relationships. Spend time investing in existing relationships. Sometimes an existing relationship can grow and offer additional support.

Offer support to others. Take the first step and offer support to someone in your life. Sometimes support offered is reciprocated.

Build relational skills. Work to build skills that enhance your ability to engage in healthy relationships. Practice active listening skills –make sure you are reliable and trustworthy, and express gratitude when people support you.

Building Emotional Resilience: *Helping Others*



Did you know that God created each person uniquely and gave them gifts and abilities to help others? In 1 Corinthians 12, the metaphor of the body is used to describe how people are supposed to work together and help one another.

God's Handiwork

In this chapter it says, *"Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good."* This means that God gives each person gifts or manifestations of His Spirit so they can help each other. The chapter then goes on to describe different types of gifts and the importance of each person's gifts.

Similarly, Ephesians 2:10 says, *"For we are God's handiwork [or masterpiece], created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."*

When God created each person, He had a special plan for their life. This plan gives each life purpose and involves ways they will bless other people. God's plan for people is that they serve one another.

In fact, before each person was born God had things in mind for them to do to help others. And, because each person is a work of art or 'masterpiece', His plan for them is unique and very special.

Benefits of Helping Others

When a person helps others, they are helping both the other person and themselves. According to a recent *Psychology Today* article²⁴, research has found many examples of how doing good, in big or small ways, not only feels good, but also does us good.

For example, volunteering actually boosts well-being and decreases feelings of depression.²⁵ This holds true for many different forms of altruistic behavior. Even when it comes to money, spending it on others predicts increases in happiness compared to spending it on ourselves.²⁶ Further, there is now evidence from brain imaging studies suggesting a correlation between generosity and well-being in the brain.²⁷ God's design for people to help one another is actually for their own good!



Taking Action

There are endless ways to help other people that are very easy, but take intentionality. The list below includes suggestions for getting started. See if you can find a way to help another person each week.

- **Send an encouraging text.** Let a friend or family member know you are thinking about them. Ask how their day is going.
- **Pray for someone.** As the Lord brings people to your mind pray for them and let them know you are lifting them up in prayer.
- **Offer practical help.** Identify a practical need and meet it. Prepare and deliver a meal, mow someone's lawn, do a family member's laundry or chore, or watch a single parent's children so they have time to themselves.
- **Acts of kindness.** Choose a person to do an act of kindness for. Send flowers to an elderly neighbor, bake and deliver dessert to your pastor's house, or send a card to someone living in a convalescent home.
- **Donate to a charity.** If you have the means, select a charity that you believe in and make a donation.
- **Volunteer.** Offer your gifts and abilities to others by volunteering for a ministry at your church, at a local nonprofit, or at a school.

People often describe feeling 'good' after helping others. Allow yourself to stay with that feeling and remember that serving others pleases God. It is healthy to feel joy when you obey God and live in a way that pleases Him.

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