

HAPPY AGAIN:

Freedom from Anxiety and Depression

Worksheet Packet

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Affirmation

*God loves and accepts me unconditionally
the way I am right now.*

*Therefore,
I accept myself unconditionally
the way I am right now.*

Serenity Prayer

*God, grant me the serenity
to accept the things I cannot change,
The courage to change the things I can,
And the wisdom to know the difference.*

Family History Exercise

This is a powerful writing exercise that can help you unlock the “recorded tapes” that play in the background of your life. Write out the message (positive and negative) that you received as a child or adolescent from your mother, father, and your peers. Also list major “earthquake events” that happened in your family growing up (divorce, death, abortion, etc). Finally, write out the cumulative messages you received about yourself as a result.

1. Messages from Mother

2. Messages from Father

3. Messages from Peers

4. "Earthquake" Events

5. Cumulative Messages Received

Journaling Your Way to Emotional Health

When I was in school, I had several teachers that required us to journal on a regular basis. Of course there were certain parameters and topics we had to cover. We were graded according to how well we followed instructions, and whether our writing was free of spelling and grammatical errors. I was frustrated by the assignment and didn't much enjoy it.

A couple months ago, I came across an interesting story on NPR (<http://tinyurl.com/nbwuqqx>) on how journaling can better one's mental and emotional health. I have read similar things from other sources but was particularly intrigued by the research that was presented in this article. According to the author, writing about one's own story can help with coping and processing memories.

I tried the exercise myself and found that on the days I was intentional about journaling, I felt more at ease and less prone to stress. I have since then passed on a modified version of this exercise to many of my clients. The instructions I give are simple:

1. Find a notebook or journal.

It doesn't have to be a fancy leather-bound diary—a simple notebook with lines will do.

2. Time yourself for 15 minutes.

Set a watch or the timer on your phone.

3. Write about a specific memory or an issue you are currently dealing with.

Don't worry about spelling or grammar. You are not being graded. This is all about getting your emotions out on paper.

4. Do this four days in a row.

Try writing before bed when you are winding down, or during your daily devotions.

Unlike the journaling I was forced to do as a teen in junior high, I found this activity enjoyable and freeing. Several times, my ramblings turned into prayers and one-sided conversations with God on paper. One reason I believe this works is because you are allowing yourself to process things through free association—the same thing you are doing in counseling.

Change the Way You Feel

The Power of Thoughts

We are often unaware of where our feelings come from. Why are some people in such a good mood all the time while others seem depressed? What causes our moods to change?

Feelings are caused by thoughts. What we think about emerges from what we believe. For example, if you believe that you have a dead end job, you are most likely going to think that every shift is going to be miserable. This will affect how you feel—frustrated or annoyed. If you think:

“Man, today is going to stink. My life is going nowhere with this job.” You will not likely be in the best of spirits.

Beliefs → Thoughts → Feelings

Now what if you still hated your job but put your thinking into better perspective?

“Yeah this isn’t my dream job but I’m looking for another one. I’m still gaining a lot of skills that I can use in the future and I’m making good connections with people here in the mean time.”

Change Your Mood

Expanding your thinking and making it more positive and redemptive instantly affects your attitude. Notice what you think about. If your thoughts are negative, you will feel negative. Think positively and redemptively.

Fill your mind with positive thoughts. This doesn’t mean you should resort to wishful thinking, but make it a habit to think realistically and redemptively. Start challenging falsehoods in your thinking.

The way we think affects how we feel emotionally. But is this authentic? Positive thinking is regarded by many to be trite and patronizing. A thought life that is transformative is not based on wishful thinking or denying reality. It should be *realistic and redemptive*.

Thinking Redemptively

Scripture tells the story of reality—the realistic pain of our fallen world but also the hope of redemption. The Bible has a positive trajectory. The gospel is a message of hope. This should be the center of how we think. The Apostle Paul reminds us to think about: “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.”

This isn't denying reality. It's not living in La-La Land. It means being fully aware of the bad but not being overtaken by it. Feelings come from thoughts and thoughts come from what you believe. If you believe the truth of God and flood your mind with His message of joy, peace and redemption, you'll find your attitude toward life completely transform.

False Beliefs

1. **Perfectionism:** You see things as either all good or all bad. If you fall short somewhere, you see yourself as completely bad or worthless. In reality, no person or thing on earth is completely good (only Christ was). God wants us to rest in His grace since the demand for perfection was taken care of at the cross.

“No one is good, except God alone.” —Mark 10:18b, NIV

2. **Negativity:** You see everything from a negative perspective. You see a single negative occurrence as a never-ending pattern and completely dismiss the positive aspects. In reality, God wants us to have a *redemptive* perspective. This isn't wishful thinking, but we should see God's good intent in all things, with trust that He makes all things come together for good.

“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to His purpose.” —Romans 8:28, NIV

3. **Fortune Telling:** You jump to a negative conclusion even though you don't have the evidence to support your reasoning. You may negatively predict what people are thinking, without asking. Or you may predict that something may end up badly even though you don't have the proof. Only God knows the future and knows the minds of other people.

*“Since no one knows the future, who can tell someone else what is to come?”
—Ecclesiastes 8:7, NIV*

*“For who knows a person's thoughts except their own spirit within them? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.”
—1 Corinthians 2:11, NIV*

4. **Judgmentalism:** You judge yourself or your situation from a distorted human perspective. You label yourself, or you magnify the negative and minimize the positive. Like the Pharisees, you are legalistic toward

yourself and live by “shoulds” and rules which only leads to more shame. God wants you to live by His grace. Only He is the perfect judge and can perfectly discern your situation.

“Let’s practice real love. This is the only way we’ll know we’re living truly, living in God’s reality. It’s also the way to shut down debilitating self-criticism, even when there is something to it. For God is greater than our worried hearts and knows more about us than we do ourselves. And friends, once that’s taken care of and we’re no longer accusing or condemning ourselves, we’re bold and free before God!”

—1 John 3:18-21, MSG

5. **Self-Pity:** You see yourself as the cause of negative events even though you aren’t responsible. Or you base your view of reality on your own personal emotions. Ironically, this is an insidious form of conceit and self-centeredness.

“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves.”

—Philippians 2:3, NIV

What Happened?

Automatic Thoughts

False Beliefs

— Perfectionism

— Negativity

— Fortune Telling

— Judgmentalism

— Self Pity

Balanced Response