
Attacking Anxiety

Book Summary

INTRODUCTION

The solution is NOT to pull yourself up by your bootstraps and force your way through this in your own strength. According to Ephesians 3:20, it is His power at work within us. If you or a loved one are at the end of your rope today, take heart. The key is letting the God of this universe do the heavy lifting as your life is transformed.

You can't come face-to-face with the Word of God and the truth about mental illness and not begin to see a transformation in your life.

Chapter 1 – Live Free

Anxiety and depression go hand in hand. You might struggle 99% of the time with one and 1% with the other, but they are both there. And let's be honest, some days it feels like you're struggling 100% with both. The Bible puts it like this: "Anxiety in the heart of man causes depression" (Proverbs 12:25 NKJV).

Whether you feel like you are dealing primarily with one or are drowning in both, let's just agree that we are in this together and that it is time for all of us to head in one direction: toward new levels of freedom!

When it comes to your anxiety, depression, and pending freedom, I want you to fully understand what God has promised you. The apostle Paul wrote in his letter to his friends in Galatia, "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery" (Galatians 5:1).

God is very clear throughout Scripture that he wants us to experience freedom—and that it is actually attainable. Remember, I want you to know exactly what God promised you so that you can start to build up your faith. Freedom for you or your loved one is actually attainable!

God Wants You to Experience: Peace

"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 Wants You to Experience: Joy

"You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand" (Psalm 16:11).

God Wants You to Experience: Purpose

"He has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of His own purpose and grace. This grace was given to us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time" (2 Timothy 1:9).

God Wants You to Experience: Confidence

"But blessed is the one who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is in him" (Jeremiah 17:7).

God Wants You to Experience: Protection

"But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen you and protect you from the evil one" (2 Thessalonians 3:3).

God Wants You to Experience: Victory

“But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Corinthians 15:57).

Stand Firm

What did you notice about those verses? Hopefully, you saw that they represent the exact opposite of anxiety, depression, and hopelessness.

Mental illness is not God’s plan for your life. He wants you to live free.

Jesus died for you—not just to let you out of prison but so you could experience freedom – love, joy, peace and all the fruit of the spirit.

As we move forward, you have one job to do. There is a second half to Galatians 5:1. Let’s read it again: “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. **Stand firm**, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.”

What did you notice? The verse says that if we want to walk in the freedom we’ve been given, it’s our job to stand firm. And this standing firm is where the fight begins. For too long I, and many people I know, have sat back on our heels and dealt with depression and been attacked by anxiety. We’ve just taken it and assumed it was our lot in life. No more! Anxiety and depression will attack, but now we’re going to learn how to attack back and fight for the freedom to which we’ve already been given access.

God was teaching the nation of Israel then, and us today, that often He will give us things in this life, equip us for battle, and then expect us to go fight and take possession of the very things he’s made possible for us to experience. Paul writes in Galatians 5 that God promised us Jesus has already bought our freedom. And now it’s up to you and me to fight and take hold of that freedom. That’s why, when anxiety and depression attack, we attack back!

We will use the God-given weapons at our disposal to take possession of the peace, joy, freedom, and confidence God wants you to experience—and I’m telling you this is possible for you today.

We’ve been set free, but now it’s time to live free.

Chapter 2 – You Are Not Crazy

There are some moments in life where it feels like God is speaking right through you. This was one of those moments. Without thinking, I told him three things: “You are not crazy. You are not alone. And this will end.”

The starting point for dealing with anxiety and depression is knowing these three things are true. Those are the words I needed to hear at my lowest moment. And those are the words you need to hear right now because they are true no matter what level of anxiety or depression you're dealing with, no matter how long it has been or how hopeless you feel.

YOU ARE NOT CRAZY. YOU ARE NOT ALONE. THIS WILL END.

There are two types of anxiety:

- 1) Facilitating anxiety (healthy fear)
- 2) Debilitating anxiety (unhealthy fear)

Facilitating anxiety is God's grace – it's a healthy fear. But it's easy to let that fear go too far, isn't it? When facilitating anxiety turns into debilitating anxiety, it begins to prohibit us from living our normal lives, doing our daily activities and walking in God's calling. Debilitating anxiety is an unhealthy fear that causes us to stop living and enjoying our lives.

Keep Going

That's how anxiety and depression work. They can come out of nowhere and hit harder than you ever imagined. It's not just you. You are not crazy. Broken? Sure. A work in progress? Of course.

Just like everyone else in the world. Join the party. You, me and every other living soul are in the same boat.

And here's the fantastic news: your healing can begin right now, at this moment. Remember my testimony is not just the part about being overwhelmed. It's also about being set free from this stuff in ways I never dreamed possible. I'm not perfect, not even close. But I'm also not where I used to be. I'm stronger, healthier and better than I was in ways I didn't think I'd ever be. The same can be true for you. All you have to do is run to God.

You don't have to be embarrassed about your brokenness or humiliated by your emotions. God already knows all your thoughts and actions anyway, yet he still invites us to come to him, "Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. (Hebrews 4:16)

You are a child of God. He loves you just the way you are. He wants you to come to him in "your time of need." When you're at your lowest. When you hit bottom. When you feel wrong and messy and broken.

The Bible says our "time of need" is the very moment God invites us to run to him to receive his mercy, grace and help.

For some, that moment is right now. You don't have to clean yourself up before you approach God; you can approach God with confidence right in the middle of your darkest time.

You haven't shocked God. Your life may feel like it is unravelling but I promise you God can help put it back together. Let's run to Him. Let's go to the throne of grace boldly, and let's watch God do some incredible things in our lives.

You are not crazy. You are not alone. This will end.

Chapter 3 – You Are Not Alone

We don't need to experience solitary confinement to know how bad it is; there is something inside all of us that knows we were not created to live in isolation. Check out the first critique (observation) God had of creation at the beginning of the Bible: "It is not good for the man to be alone." (Genesis 2:18)

Every single one of us was created to pursue the plans of God with the people of God. Scripture tells us to "rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn." (Romans 12:15) God built us to celebrate the highs and battle through the lows together.

We Were Created for Community

One of the reasons mental illness is so dangerous is because it tends to isolate us. Anxiety and depression feed us the lie that we are the only ones struggling, and if you are anything like me, you start to believe it. We become convinced that not only are we crazy but also that no one will ever understand. And so, instead of talking about it, we check ourselves into our own self prescribed solitary confinement.

Whether you struggle with anxiety and depression or love someone who does, the second thing you have to know is that you are not alone. Seriously. The thought that you were alone is a lie from the pit of hell. If you deal with anxiety or depression, you're not even in the minority.

Some of the greatest names in the Bible, heroes of the faith, fought the same battles and were courageous enough to admit it. You are not alone!

The Bible

One of the many things I love about the Bible is its authenticity. God could have painted a picture of the heroes of our faith as being perfect, always mentally and emotionally strong and confident, but he didn't. He showed us their strengths, their weaknesses, their victories, and their failures. And most importantly for us in this context, we catch a glimpse of their very real inner struggles.

Some of the most influential individuals to walk the face of this earth dealt with anxiety, depression and mental and emotional anguish - just like we do. It's so freeing when we begin to truly understand that we, and those we love, are not alone in this. It's not just you; it's not just your loved ones. You are not alone!

The Apostle Paul

Let's start with Paul, one of the most influential Christians to ever live. The man who wrote nearly half the books in the New Testament and took the gospel further than anyone before him. The guy who planted churches all around the known world. Listen to what he said to some of his friends who lived in a city called Corinth: "We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about the troubles we experienced in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself." (2 Corinthians 1:8)

Those are big words. Life's pressures were more than he could handle. At some point he didn't feel like he could keep going.

Paul was the guy everyone was looking to, and yet he was courageous enough to admit he was dealing with so much anxiety, depression, and hopelessness that he had moments where he "despaired of life itself." If he could say it, so can we!

The Apostle Paul dealt with anxiety and depression. Let that encourage you. You don't have to hide it or be embarrassed, and you certainly aren't too weak to be used by God. You are not alone!

King David

Remember David? The one who killed Goliath with a slingshot and later became the greatest king Israel ever had. The one God called, "a man after my own heart." (Acts 13:22) Well, that mighty man of God also wrote this, "Why my soul are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? (Psalm 42:5)

What a great way to describe anxiety and depression. Notice in one verse David described dealing with both at the same time. His soul was both downcast and disturbed because the two go hand-in-hand. David had the courage to stand up and admit he wasn't okay.

This wasn't a mild case either; the next time you have your Bible open, read the rest of Psalm 42. David didn't think he was going to make it. He wasn't eating. He couldn't stop crying and he couldn't handle how disturbed he was on the inside. If you know anxiety and depression, these feelings are all-too-familiar. David wasn't embarrassed by his emotional state, and we shouldn't be either.

Jesus.

Not to beat a dead horse but if it makes you feel any better, Jesus knows how you feel. Listen to what he said in Matthew 26:36-38.

Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to the disciples, "Sit here while I go and pray over there." And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed. Then He said to them, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me."

This was Jesus - God in the form of a man. And he understood what it was like to be so overwhelmed with sorrow that it felt like death. It's no wonder the writer of Hebrews told us, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way just as we are - yet he did not sin. (4:15)

Listen, you are not the only one. Do you believe me yet? The thing is, you can hear what the professionals say, listen to the cry of the masses at church, read about the heroes of the faith, even hear the truth from Jesus himself and still feel alone.

On paper, that makes absolutely no sense yet that's been the experience for so many of us. What's the problem? How come, despite the overwhelming evidence, we still feel alone?

Whether you know it or not, there is a spiritual battle going on right now for your soul, your freedom and your ability to live free.

The Thief

There is an enemy whispering lies into your ear, trying to drag you back down into isolation. Jesus said it best: "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life and have it to the full." (John 10:10)

Jesus came to this earth to go to the cross, pay for our sins, and make a way for us to live free. But Satan is very real, and he wants to steal, kill and destroy every good thing in your life. He wants to rob you of the very freedom Jesus died to provide you with, and Satan has one very predictable yet deceptive tactic.

Satan doesn't just tell lies; he is a liar. The Bible calls him "the father of lies." (John 8:44) If you're keeping track at home, so far he's been called a thief and the father of lies. How's that for a rap sheet? Remember, his goal is to get in your head and steal away all your hope, and he does so by whispering lies to convince you you're all by yourself. You've heard these lies before, haven't you?

Satan's lies always move us toward isolation. He wants you to keep everything in the dark, so his tactic is to make you feel like you are alone.

I kept my pain in the dark hoping it would disappear wondering where all this anxiety and depression was coming from. Believe me, I was trying to speak up. Before people knew how bad it was, I would start trying to talk, but Satan knew that would lead to freedom, so he'd jump in and tell me lies.

The voices were just too loud and too persuasive, so I'd stuff my struggle down and keep it to myself for the rest of the day. But one day turned into one week, which turned into a month, which turned into several years. I blinked and before I knew it I was sobbing on the side of the highway spiraling out of control wondering if I could keep on living, and the people closest to me didn't even know how bad it really was.

That's solitary confinement. That's torture. And I get it. It feels real. But it's a lie.

Into the Light

Do you know what's wild? Once it all came out; once my wife, friends and co-workers heard the struggle straight from my lips; once I told them how bad it was - they all respected me more, and they were able to love me even more authentically. It brought us all closer together because they knew how to help fight with me. Talking about your struggles is like shining a bright light on them, but Satan had sold me on the idea that I needed to keep my struggles to myself or else I would lose all my authority and respect as a Christian leader. Nothing could have been further from the truth. My honesty brought a brand-new level of freedom.

God meant what He said: "Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up. Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken."

The father of lies is trying to keep us in isolation. He's lying to you. The thief has been stealing your peace, killing your joy and destroying your hope for too long. It's time to put an end to it. It's time to attack back! And our offensive battle plan starts with real, honest conversation with people we love and trust.

Break the Silence

One of the biggest lies I bought into was that silence was a viable solution. Somewhere in the recesses of my mind, the enemy convinced me that I should keep my mouth shut. But I was wrong.

I want to invite you to join me. Fear kept me in the dark and I don't want you to make the same mistake. If you struggle with anxiety or depression, have an honest conversation with someone you love and trust. Just admit that your struggle is there so you can begin processing it in some God-given ways.

If you struggle with anxiety or depression, you aren't crazy; you're just broken like the rest of us.

Welcome to the party! Talk about it with someone. There is so much freedom in verbalizing it out loud. If you keep it in the dark, it will grow, but as soon as you bring it to the light, it will lose so much of its power.

The God of Hope

We have a God of hope who plans to fill you with joy and peace. Let this verse speak to you today. Let the God of the universe breathe life and encouragement into you right now: "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." (Romans 15:13)

This battle can feel hopeless at times. But despite how we may feel, the fact is God can completely replace that hopelessness with an overflowing hope. He's going to do it. And it won't be because you magically became strong enough to defeat the enemy on your own. It will be because his power is at work within you.

You can do this! Your God is at work. Remember these three things as we begin the journey toward freedom:

You are not crazy. You are not alone. This will end.

Chapter 4 - This Will End

God is in the business of writing comebacks stories in and through our lives. Have you ever noticed that the word testimony (the story of what God has done in your life) begins with the word test?

Right now, you may feel like your situation is impossible. Your mental health may make you want to give up or

throw in the towel. You may be so consumed in a season of anxiety and depression that you can't possibly imagine a brighter future, but that's a lie. You need to know that. What if all the obstacles you are facing are simply setting the scene for a fantastic story?

Put simply: the greater the test, the greater the testimony.

If that feels impossible to you, here's the really good news: that's okay. It's better than okay. That's the setup for the perfect comeback story. **Impossible is God's specialty!**

Impossible and the Possible

One day, Jesus looked at a group of people and said something so profound that Matthew decided to include it in his gospel. And thank God he did because it's something I often need to hear. "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." (Matthew 19:26).

All things are possible with God. Picture your anxiety. Picture your depression. Picture the level of hopelessness you've felt at your lowest point. Got it?

Okay, now picture the God of the universe who knows you better than anyone on this planet, the God who knows exactly what you've been through and precisely what you are facing.

Hear God saying this to you: with me, nothing is impossible.

That's what God is telling you today. This is not the end. This is not how your story is going to finish. I believe God wants you to begin to understand that right now. Today, as bad as things can look and feel, God's just getting started in your life. With him, all things are possible!

Listen to what the Word of God has to say about your life: "Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:6).

God finishes what he starts. Believe it or not, God has begun a work in your life that he will bring to completion. God's not going to just get you or your loved one through this season; he's building a testimony that can change the world around you for the rest of your life. And remember, the greater the test, the greater the testimony.

Don't you dare give up! If you look up all the great success stories, they all have one thing in common: the situation looked hopeless, and then something amazing happened. That's how our God works. This is what God does. He picks us up at our lowest points and takes us to heights greater than anything we could think of or imagine.

And he is about to blow everyone away with the amazing things he is going to do in and through your life.

This is the pattern throughout Scripture. Think about any of your favorite Bible heroes – the ones who did something amazing. They had a time in the wilderness before they started seeing victory in their lives.

Rock Bottom

I know how bad anxiety can hurt and depression can devastate. I know the lies that hopelessness tells us. But listen to me – those are lies from the pit of hell. I can see that now, but it felt so real in the moment. Please hear me: nobody in this world will be better off without you. If you decide to die by suicide because you think you're at the end, every single person who cares about you will live with an unreal pain for the rest of their lives. You will do so much more harm than good.

Let me say that again in case you have been listening to the lies of Satan – nobody in this world will be better off without you.

And I promise you, you're going to turn around one day and realize how far you've come since rock-bottom. Things will get better. You will find a level of peace, joy, confidence, security, and hopefulness that you never thought possible. And at that moment, you will be so thankful that you didn't do anything stupid.

If you feel like your anxiety and depression will never end, I understand. If your loved ones feels like their depression, anxiety, and hopelessness will never end, I understand. But what I also understand is that those are lies. Nobody would have been better off without me. My wife helped me to see the truth when I couldn't see it for myself.

Let me help you see it right now if you can't see it for yourself: this is not the end of your story. God has a plan for your life, and that plan includes levels of freedom you can't imagine. You can't see it yet, but you will.

I am so thankful I never did anything stupid when my emotions were lying to me. God is working in your life right now, even if you can't see it. You will get better.

**Our God is a God of new mercies, new mornings,
new starts, new beginnings and new creations.**

Our God restores our lives, and he uses the trials we've been through to bring us more purpose than we ever thought possible.

You need to know this is not the end. Your story and your life are not over. He has plans and a hope and a future in store for you that will absolutely blow you away.

Yes, you're in the middle of a test. Yes, it feels impossible. But yes, your God is at work. Don't you dare give up. God is just getting started!

And remember, the greater the test, the greater the testimony. You are going to win this battle, but first, you have to know:

YOU ARE NOT CRAZY. YOU ARE NOT ALONE. THIS WILL END.

Chapter 5 – Fighting

It's time for you to stop being mad at yourself and start being mad at the Enemy. This anxiety is not about you. This depression is not about you; this hopelessness is not about you. There is a very real enemy, and he wants to kill, steal, and destroy your life. It's time you got mad at him. It's time you blamed him. And it's time you started fighting."

When he finished, I didn't have any words. I didn't need any words. Something new was stirring in the depths of my soul.

I want you to know right now that no matter how long you've dealt with anxiety or depression or no matter how long your loved one has struggled with it, this does not have to be the way the story ends. But it is time to start fighting.

**You are in the middle of a fight. And it's important to know who you
are fighting. You're not fighting anxiety; you're not fighting depression; and
you're not fighting hopelessness. You are fighting Satan. The devil. The enemy.**

Call him whatever you want, but he is very real, and he wants to steal, kill, and destroy the very real plans that God has for your life. Remember, those aren't my words; they are Jesus words: "the thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it more abundantly." (John 10:10).

And the apostle Paul said it this way: "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Ephesians 6:12).

Fighting Words

Satan doesn't create anything on his own. All he ever does is try to twist the things that God has made into something negative.

Think about fear. Remember earlier when I mentioned that facilitating anxiety (healthy fear) is actually from God? In its original state, fear isn't a bad thing. It's a healthy emotion that keeps us safe and, on our toes, and at times, it helps us perform our best. The problem is, Satan loves to try to twist God's gifts to make them feel like curses.

Sadness is another example. When you lose something or someone you love, it's necessary to feel sad. That sadness is a sign that we actually care. That we actually love. But when the enemy twists sadness into depression, it feels like the sadness switch is broken and doom is inevitable.

That's how Satan works. Every day he is on a horrible mission to twist God's gifts into something he hopes will destroy you. He wants God-given emotions to become deep, debilitating, unhealthy anxiety and depression that steal our ability to walk in God's calling on our lives.

This is not a shock to God and should not be a shock to us. 2000 years ago, Jesus told us this would happen. And he also told us not to worry because he would take care of things. He said it like this: "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

We are broken people living in a broken world, and every now and then, we might have to fight to experience the very freedom that Christ has already provided us with.

But the good news is we can fight back. We can be victorious. We can overcome. We can conquer things like anxiety and depression. We can experience freedom on levels that we may never have thought possible.

Why? Because greater is he who is within me than he that is in the world (1 John 4:4). The power and the presence of Jesus Christ working in and through our lives is greater than anything Satan can do. He may want to use anxiety and depression to steal from, kill, or destroy us, but when we stand up and fight – when we decide to attack back – he always loses.

**He can't take our peace. He can't steal our joy. He can't destroy our purpose.
Those things are rightfully ours. We just have to be willing to fight for them.**

Remember the verse we started this journey with. "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery." (Galatians 5:1).

Freedom is a gift. It is our God-given right that has been purchased for us. But in order to enjoy it and experience it, we have to take a stand. We have to work for it. Sometimes that freedom will come easily and naturally, but other times, we will need to fight. Whether you're fighting for yourself or you're fighting for a loved one, it's time to fight.

We need to start praying. We need to start worshiping. We need to start fighting!"

I was walking into an all-out war, a dog fight for my freedom. And prayer and worship proved to be some of the very weapons I needed to relearn how to use.

If something is stirring deep in your soul right now, it's because you are realizing (whether for the first time or the hundredth time) that you have the power to attack back.

Chapter 6 – Using Worship as a Weapon

"The rules are simple. Take this Bluetooth speaker into that room, blast some worship music, and start worshiping and praying out loud together."

You're both going to pray out loud for 30 straight minutes at the volume of the music. When he saw the deer-in-the-headlights look I gave him, he explained the method to his madness. He reminded us we were in a battle, and the first two weapons we needed to use were prayer and worship.

But then he said something that changed the trajectory of my life: "Satan hates it when we pray like this. It destroys him."

That's what I needed to hear. His words instantly brought me back to something that had happened less than a year prior, an experience that changed my family's lives forever. An event where I felt like God was telling me to stop seeing worship as singing songs in church and begin viewing it as a weapon to battle for my freedom.

In Joshua 6, as soon as they started worshiping, Jericho's walls, which were securely barred, miraculously fell, and the Israelites were able to overcome the city.

The Israelites didn't have a chance on their own strength. However, right in the middle of their confusion, fear, anxiety, depression, and (I have to believe) feelings of hopelessness, God showed up in a spectacular way. They experienced freedom and a victory they never dreamed possible. And the whole thing was put in motion with a weapon called worship.

Sometimes we worship because we've had a victory. But sometimes we worship until we see one.

God demonstrated to Joshua that there would be times in life where worship would be the way to victory. Worship will be the way you defeat your enemy. Worship will be what brings you the very freedom you so badly desire.

The theme of the entire teaching series was that we don't have to live afraid because we can stand on the promises of God's word. And the key verse of the whole series was Joshua 1:9: "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go."

Through all the confusion, I realized the real question I was trying to ask. "What do I do when I'm standing on your promises that say I don't have to be afraid, but I still feel afraid?"

I'll never forget the response. I didn't hear God's audible voice. But a thought I never would've come up with on my own hit me so clearly that it must have been God.

When you're standing on my Word that says you don't have to be afraid, but you still feel afraid, put your foot down, and put your hands up.

I knew exactly what God was saying to me. This is what I've been trying to articulate to our church for several weeks. God gives us promises in Scripture; our job is to put our foot down and stand on those promises while we lift our hands and worship.

Claim the promises and then praise God as if they have already come true.

Sometimes you will worship because of a victory, but other times you worship until you see one. So, put your foot down, and put your hands up because it's time to use worship as a weapon!

God was telling me to do the very same thing he had told Joshua to do. And I believe that's exactly what God wants you to do right now. I know that what you're up against feels impossible. I know that what you're up against scares you to death. I know the walls in front of you feel like a prison that will never come down. So I'm telling you, starting right now, I want you to worship until the walls fall down.

That night was the scariest moment of my life. It was panic, fear, and uncertainty all at the same time, but I put my hands up in the air, I stomped my foot on the floor, and I just began to stand on the promises of God:

- No matter what comes my way, I don't have to be afraid because even if I can't feel it, I know God is with me. (Joshua 1:9).
- God has a plan for my life and for my loved ones, even if I don't understand it (Jeremiah 29:11).
- God is working in my life and in my son's life right now, even if I can't see it. (Romans 8:28).
- No weapon formed against me shall prosper. (Isaiah 54:17).
- Greater is he who is within me than he that is in the world. (1 John 4:4).
- In all things, I am more than a conqueror through him who loves me. (Romans 8:37).

I started speaking these promises out loud, telling Satan what God has to say about my future. Before I knew it, I was using worship as a weapon to battle for my sanity, peace, and freedom. If you happen to be walking around the hospital that night, here's what you would've heard:

God, I know your word promises that you're with me and that you'll never leave me or forsake me. I know I don't have to be afraid. I know you have a plan, even when I can't see it or understand it. Your word says no weapon formed against me shall prosper. God, I worship you tonight. I know that you're good, even though I'm hurting. I know that you're good, even though I'm confused. I know that you're with us, and I know you are still a miracle-working God who is in the miracle-working business. I stand on your Word, and I put my hands in the air, and I praise you tonight.

Some unbelievable things happened. My son was miraculously healed. Doctors in the hospital were literally using the word miracle. A few days later, we were able to leave the hospital, and today, he is 100% healthy and whole.

My family and I learned firsthand that worship is an absolute weapon. It is a weapon of mass destruction that destroys Satan's ability to mess with your mind, your will, and your emotions.

The War Room

We were armed with the weapon of worship, ready to battle for my freedom from anxiety and depression. I found some songs that talk about peace, freedom, and victory, and I continued to wield the weapon of worship by putting those songs on repeat. I declare God's promises over my life every day.

"I will see a victory. No weapon formed against me shall prosper. There will be a day when I will have a breakthrough. This will be my testimony, not my long-standing reality, in Jesus name."

Worship sustained me through one of the most challenging seasons of my life. I leaned on it every day. I worshiped in the mornings, in the car, and every night. Whenever I started to feel an anxiety attack come on, I played worship music. I don't know where I would be without this weapon called worship.

My challenge to you, even if worship music is not your genre of choice, is to ask around, get online, do what you need to do to find some songs that speak to your soul. Find songs that declare the goodness of God and talk about finding peace, joy, purpose, and freedom. Create a playlist and go to battle with it daily.

Why Worship?

At this point, you might be asking how worshiping could possibly change your situation. Great question.

In Scripture God taught us two unique ways to experience his presence. The first is the public gathering. There are several reasons we gather together as a church, but one of them is because of God's promise, "Where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them" (Matthew 18:20).

The other way is worship. Psalm 22:3 tells us that God inhabits the praises of his people. Which is a fancy way of saying, when we worship, God's presence shows up! And that is a big deal because here are the byproducts of spending time in God's presence:

Peace (Philippians 4:6–7)

Joy (Psalm 16:11)

Rest (Exodus 33:14)

Confidence (Jeremiah 17:7)

Guidance (Exodus 15:13)

Protection (Psalm 5:11; Isaiah 41:10)

Power (Joshua 1:9; Ephesians 3:20)

What do peace, joy, rest, confidence, guidance, protection, and power all have in common? They are the opposite of fear, worry, anxiety, and depression. In other words, God is the solution! If we just spend time in God's presence, he promises to give us the very things we are praying for every day.

If you have anxiety or depression, I want you to continue praying for peace, joy, rest, confidence, guidance, protection, and power. But I also want you to realize that worship will bring those things into your life.

**Worship defeats depression. Worship overcomes anxiety. Worship restores confidence.
Worship is a weapon that can defeat the things that the enemy is trying to use to take you out.**

It's time you started fighting. It's time to attack anxiety! Stop being so mad at yourself. Stop being so hard on yourself. Stop blaming yourself and start blaming the enemy. It's time to get angry and go to war. It's time to begin battling for the freedom Jesus has given you, and one of the best ways to fight for your peace, joy, purpose, and freedom is to use this weapon called worship.

Chapter 7 – Praying Like A Warrior

Get real intentional about telling God these specific things in your life for which you are thankful.

I'm telling you, this combination of worship and prayer is deadly to anxiety and depression. But if you are anything like me, when you hear that word prayer, just about every insecurity begins rising to the surface.

I knew that I was in the battle for my life and that prayer was the spiritual weapon I had to learn to love. I was desperate for change and was ready to take my prayer life to a new level. Although, if I'm totally honest, I had plenty of self-doubts.

God knows we are broken people living in a broken world. And he knows the reality of anxiety and depression and the real effects they have on every area of our lives. So he got real specific in his Word:

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 says he will bring us a peace that doesn't even make sense in this situation. A peace that passes all our understanding. All we have to do is ask!

Thanksgiving

The second half of the equation Paul gave us involves gratitude. He instructed us to present our petitions with thanksgiving.

Start telling God all the things I am thankful for, and then he said one of the most profound things I've ever heard:

It's hard to be depressed and thankful at the same time.

That line has been a game changer for me. When I'm feeling down, gratitude changes things. By making a list of all the things I am thankful for, my perspective shifts. Telling God all about the things on my list changes my mindset.

I tried to start each day with a few minutes of gratitude. Before I do anything else, I began by thanking God for all the blessings I have, and it changes the course of my entire day.

This is the power of prayer. Don't overcomplicate it. Especially in the heat of the moment. Few things attack anxiety and defeat depression faster than gratitude.

You are a mighty warrior.

Take this to heart; I mean it. Even if you don't feel like it, the God of the universe is going with you. That means you are a mighty warrior!

You can do this. You are going to attack anxiety and defeat depression and experience levels of freedom that you have never felt before. As you step into this battle and start to use this weapon of prayer, remember God is with you.

You're perfect in his sight. He loves you! He's working in your life even when you can't see it. He has a plan even when you can't feel it, and he's with you every step of the way. You are a mighty warrior!

Chapter 8 – Remembering To Attack Back

When we talk about attacking anxiety, we are talking about attacking the one causing our anxiety. The one who wants to steal, kill, and destroy our lives. Get ready for a dog fight. After all, we are fighting against the devil, and

the devil doesn't play fair. He'll wield anxiety, depression, hopelessness, and any other terrible weapons he has in his arsenal to fight dirty.

And so, to get ready to attack back, the next question to ask is: where is this battle taking place?

The Battleground

If I've learned anything about mental health over the years, it's that much of the battle begins in the mind. Call it Satan or just my own propensity to get down on myself, but the way I am feeling is typically an overflow of my own thoughts.

**We are in a fight for our lives, and the entire battleground exists between our ears.
It's time to learn how to take every thought captive. (2 Corinthians 5:10).**

The Bible reminds us that we get to choose what we focus on. Have you ever thought about the fact that we can think about what we think about? We get to decide which thoughts we dwell on. It's our choice. And it's incredible how quickly our mood, confidence, and outlook on life change when we start focusing on the right things.

**HERE IS THE SOLUTION TO WINNING THE BATTLE IN OUR MINDS:
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. (Philippians 4:8)**

Did you catch that, since Paul knew we would be fighting a battle and knew the battleground is the mind, he urged us to start thinking about what we think about.

Peace is possible. The key to obtaining it is to start remembering all the amazing things God has already done in our lives. Remembering what God has done for us is a massive weapon for defeating anxiety and depression. This is similar to the thankfulness part of prayer we talked about in the last chapter, but now we'll take it to a whole new level. Anxiety will attack, but by tuning into memories of God's victories in your life is how you attack back.

If you're dealing with depression and hopelessness or feel anxiety beginning to attack, remember to attack back. Make yourself a list of what God has already brought you through, then look at your current situation and declare out loud: "I've been here before. And I serve an all-knowing, all-powerful God. My God has got this. And because he does, yes I can!"

List #2: Remember what God has promised you

The second thing you need to start remembering is what God has promised you. This is way easier said than done. Especially when things get out of control. When times are good, it's easy to talk about God's faithfulness, but when life throws curveballs, we often lose sight of God's promises.

We can't let that happen. During the hardest moments, you need to double down and stand on God's promises all the more. This means you have to make sure you build out systems to remind yourself who God is and who God says you are, even when things get tough.

For your second list, I want you to write out a series of God's promises that you can stand on when things get tough. I did this a while back. I call the list my "War Chest."

It's 20 Bible verses that remind me who I am and who God is in every situation. These are the verses I go to when I am feeling weak, lonely, insecure, afraid, worried, confused, anxious, depressed, or hopeless. These are the verses I read aloud when I get tired of banking on my own opinions and decide to stand on something time-tested and true.

I'm going to share my war chest with you - not because I believe you need to pick the exact same verses for yours but because I think these will get you off on the right foot.

I AM LOVED

"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8).

I AM VALUED

"Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?" (Matthew 6:26).

I AM ACCEPTED

"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." (Romans 8:1).

I AM CHOSEN

"For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight." (Ephesians 1:4).

I AM CALLED

"He has saved us and called us to a holy life - not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace." (2 Timothy 1:9).

I AM SAFE

"The Lord will keep you from all harm – he will watch over your life." (Psalm 121:7).

I AM PROTECTED

"But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen you and protect you from the evil one." (2 Thessalonians 3:3).

GOD IS WITH ME

"Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go." (Joshua 1:9).

GOD WILL NEVER LEAVE ME

"And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28:20).

GOD WILL STRENGTHEN ME

"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." (Philippians 4:13).

GOD WILL GUIDE ME

"Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path." (Psalm 119:105).

GOD WILL EMPOWER ME

"What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31).

HIS SPIRIT LIVES IN ME

"Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?" (1 Corinthians 6:19).

GOD IS GREATER

"You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world." (1 John 4:4).

I AM MORE THAN A CONQUEROR

"No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us." (Romans 8:37).

NO WEAPON FORMED AGAINST ME SHALL PROSPER

"No weapon formed against you shall prosper." (Isaiah 54:17).

GOD HAS A PLAN WHEN I CAN'T SEE IT

"For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." (Jeremiah 29:11).

GOD IS WORKING WHEN I CAN'T FEEL IT

"And we know that in all things God works for the good to those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." (Romans 8:28).

NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE FOR MY GOD

"Jesus looked at them and said, with man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." (Matthew 19:26).

I WILL BE VICTORIOUS

"For the Lord your God is the one who goes with you to fight for you against your enemies to give you victory." (Deuteronomy 20:4).

This second list is essential. Feelings will come and go. We will have good days and bad, but God's word will always be true. Your war chest gives you a firm foundation to stand on when the world is spinning out of control.

Yours doesn't need to look exactly like mine. But feel free to use any or all of it. God gives us so many amazing promises in his Word. Find the ones you need, write them out as your second list, and **practice declaring them out loud!**

Remember, anxiety is going to attack, but we need to attack back.

When we hone in on these two lists, what God has brought us through and what he has promised us, we don't have to wonder if God will take care of us. That's the power of choosing to remember!

Let's make one final list to bring all this together.

List #3: Remember God Is Going With You.

(The story of Joshua...) You've probably never had to lead an entire nation, but we all have our own battles and obstacles standing in front of us.

Which means that even though God said these words to comfort Joshua, we can apply them to our own lives as well. Picture God saying this to you and your loved ones right now:

"Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged,
for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go." (Joshua 1:9).

This is so huge! This is not just a promise for Joshua – this is a promise to every single one of us today that applies to what we're dealing with right now. Understanding that the God of the universe goes everywhere we go can begin to push away our anxiety and depression and begin to usher in peace, joy, and freedom like few other things in this world can. Realizing that this applies to us in our lives today is so important in the attacking anxiety process that, later, we're going to spend more time unpacking this amazing promise.

When we remember that our heavenly Father is going with us, it changes everything about how we walk, talk, and live our lives day by day.

You don't have to know how tomorrow is going to play out. You don't have to know what's going to happen with the situation you're facing right now. You don't have to understand how the current worry is going to resolve.

**All you need to know is your heavenly Father is going with you
every step of the way, and there's nothing in this world he can't handle.**

Then I just want you to notice how small your third list starts to feel when you realize God is with you. Your worries and concerns are legitimate, but when you compare them to who God is and everything he's brought you through, they begin to lose their power.

Remember:

1. What God has brought you through.
2. What God has promised you.
3. God is going with you.

Do you see how powerful a memorial can be? Do you see what begins to happen when we take time to start attacking back?

Whatever current storm you are in, God is going to get you through it. He's done it before; he will do it again. We just need to remember where we've been so we can start standing on the truth and attacking back!

When we remember those three things, it helps us focus our attention on our new reality. It allows us to put hopelessness, depression, and anxiety in their proper place: underneath all the things that really matter so we can focus on living out God's calling on our lives.

**Anxiety is going to attack, but now you know how to attack back! Through worship,
prayer, gratitude, and remembering where God has already taken you, we can
attack anxiety, defeat depression, and start to walk in brand-new levels of freedom.**

Chapter 9 – Assembling An Army

Before you move on to the next section, there is one final thing you need to start. You have to start asking for help. You have to start assembling an army of friends and family who are ready to fight with you. If my breakdown taught me anything, it's that I am not strong enough to get through this life on my own. When I tried, I ended up crying on the side of the road. And the same is true for you. Attacking anxiety is not a solo battle.

So I'm going to ask: Who is fighting with you?

However, before we talk about assembling this army, we first need to address a bigger problem. If you are anything like me, you try to portray an external picture of yourself that is a lot more put together than what's really there internally.

Sound familiar? We all do it. It's human nature to want to present ourselves in the best possible light. All too often, we want people to fight for us, but they have no idea what the fight even looks like because we've kept our struggles to ourselves all these years. You may have the most incredible people in the world surrounding you, ready to fight for you, but if they can't see the enemy they are fighting, how could they possibly know how to help?

Complete honesty with those you love is a necessary step toward freedom.

The question we need to answer honestly is: Are we willing to let our loved ones in on everything? And I mean everything.

I can't tell you how much freedom you will begin to experience when you start sharing your brokenness with loved ones in your life. Words can't describe how great it feels to shine some light on the dark places in your soul. It feels a lot like freedom. And you deserve to feel that freedom.

The worst way to suffer is by yourself. So, I'll ask you again: Who is fighting with you? And do they know the depths of your struggle?

Think about it this way: The people closest to you in life can't fight for you if they don't know you're in a fight. James 5:16 says, "Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed."

Bringing my struggles into the light didn't magically fix everything, but it did remind me that I wasn't alone. Even in my darkest hours, I knew I always had my closest friends a phone call away. I'm telling you, fighting alongside people changed the entire battle for me. And it will do the same for you. I'm begging you, let some people fight alongside you.

Chapter 10 – Pretending You're Okay

Anxiety and depression will attack, but eventually we need to make the conscious decision to attack back. God has so much more for us, and the day we decide to start fighting for it, the battle for abundant life begins.

The secret to winning any war is equipping ourselves with the correct weapons. Remember the four ways of attacking back that we've already looked at: worship, prayer, remind yourself of all the victories in the past, and assemble an army to fight with you.

Now it's time to talk about what to stop. When it comes to battling anxiety and depression, there are some dos, but there are also a lot of don'ts. This section is about don'ts. It's about the things in your life that you need to get rid of.

We've been talking about all the things we need to add to our lives, but now let's talk about the things we need to subtract. It's time to take a stand for your freedom, draw a line in the sand, and eliminate all the unhealthy habits in your life that are causing anxiety and depression.

... He did one of the best things you could ever do for somebody struggling with this stuff: he began to tell me about his own struggles.

Rock-bottom was the place he realized just how much God loved him. God loved him enough to let him get to the end of his own strength so that he could realize how much he needed to rely on God's strength.

Rock-bottom is where we stop denying that we have a problem and stop pretending that we have enough power to overcome that problem on our own. He told me that there is no more use for our pride or our feeble attempts at pulling ourselves up by our bootstraps at rock bottom. And then he said something I'll never forget: "God showed me it was time for a necessary ending."

He had some unhealthy things in his life that had to go. Some of them had only been happening for a small amount of time, but others had been there for several years. And each one of them was making him anxious and pulling him into bouts of depression. Rock-bottom revealed how deadly they were and that they needed to change.

The freedom, the victory, and the peace in his life today all began when he realized something had to change. It was time for certain things to go, other things to change, and a few things to be put to death once and for all.

I realized that I was going to have to stop pretending. Because I had been pretending for a long time. I think that when we face difficult things and don't know how to fix them or what to do about them, one of our natural instincts is to just pretend the difficult thing isn't there.

Chapter 11 – Holding On To Unforgiveness

The second thing we need to stop is holding onto unforgiveness. Every one of us has pain in our past, and unless we do the difficult work to face it and forgive it, it will continue to fuel our anxiety and depression.

For as long as I can remember, I've either tried to forget what I went through growing up or pretended it did not affect me. But neither of those strategies work. Suppressing pain, pretending it never happened, or minimizing the effects of it will only set you up for more anxiety and depression in your life.

It turns out, my pride was the first thing that needed to come to a necessary ending. I needed to stop holding onto unforgiveness. I needed to stop pretending my past wasn't affecting my present. I needed to stop ignoring it and trying to push it down. I needed to stop trying to outrun it. It was time to admit that I needed healing.

Working through past pain is not easy, but it is possible. One of the most powerful and practical ways to start is to learn the art of forgiveness.

Forgiveness is the starting point for healing past wounds and became one of the main lessons I had to work through. Holding onto unforgiveness requires so much anxiety producing energy. We do it because we think we have the right – and we do – but it causes a lot of anxiety and depression in the process. Imagine how much precious energy we could save if we could learn to let go.

Time to Forgive

At this point, you may feel like we've strayed from the path a bit. Isn't this a book about anxiety and depression? Why are we talking about forgiveness? But nothing could be further from the truth.

If you want peace, you have to stop pretending about your past. You have to face it and forgive it. And that's just not my opinion. Scripture says:

"Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice! Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you." (2 Corinthians 13:11).

According to the Bible, the forgiveness process is the starting point for peace. And although forgiveness might sound horrific right now, I bet peace sounds pretty amazing. And that's what we're after here!

Forgiveness ushers in peace. And peace ushers out anxiety.

Forgiveness doesn't come easy. This is something I had to work on every day. Slowly but surely, I began to separate myself from the past hurts in my life, and as I did, my anxiety and depression began losing their grip, and peace began to creep in.

As we walked through these five steps, consider this question. Who is one person who has hurt you in the past? Bring that person to mind and see if you can start to forgive.

Step #1: Accept What Happened

The first thing he told me to do was realize the weight of what had happened. He told me to stop denying the pain and face it. He gave me permission to acknowledge how bad it hurt. Then he told me to think about how much that moment had affected my life since.

If you want to forgive it, you first have to feel it.

Do not minimize or deny the pain. Let yourself feel all the emotions that come with it and accept that the pain has negatively affected your life.

Step #2: Pray for Them

Next step is to pray for the person who has wronged you. If reading that sentence made you want to chuck this book across the room, I know the feeling. When we got to step two, I almost walked out of the room. Praying for the very person who wronged you feels counterintuitive. And it is. But then again, so is forgiveness. It may not make sense, but it will change your life. That's why Jesus told us, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." (Matthew 5:44).

Jesus knew how prone we'd be to hold on to bitterness, so he gave us the key to letting go – prayer. Spend some time praying for them. If you're like me, even on my most spiritual days, praying for someone who's hurt me just feels overwhelming. I can hardly force myself to say anything nice or hopeful about them out loud.

And what I really feel like doing is praying that God would do something to them that, well, is probably going in the opposite direction of what Jesus meant. If you've ever felt that way, don't worry; I'll give you a forgiveness prayer near the end of the chapter to help you get started.

Step #3: Let Go

Humans have an innate desire to repay evil with evil. When someone wrongs us, it's natural to want to harm them back. As we learned in kindergarten, two wrongs don't make a right. Or if you want something more concrete, the Bible says it like this:

Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "it is mine to avenge; I will repay" says the Lord. (Romans 12:17 – 19).

This is a big one. The day you let go of needing to repay someone for what they did to you, something will break. Bitterness will lose its grip, and forgiveness will begin to feel possible. For me, I had to start saying it out loud to

God, "okay, I'm letting go of my desire to punish them. I'm letting go of my desire to get even." They were more statements of faith than true feelings in the moment – but it was a start.

Step #4: Make the Conscious Decision to Forgive

Once you acknowledge the pain, prayed for them, and let go of the desire to repay evil with evil, it's time to make the conscious decision to forgive. Remember, forgiveness does not come naturally to us; we have to override the system and decide that we will forgive them for all the hurt and pain they've caused.

For some of your situations, it may not be smart (or safe) to have any direct contact with that person. If that's you, don't reach out to them. You can forgive them from afar. But if it is safe to reach out, there is something powerful about telling them you forgive them, love them, and are finding healing from any pain they caused.

Step #5: Work to Reconcile

This final step is only applicable if they show true repentance for the way they hurt you. Repentance doesn't mean just saying sorry – it means changing your actions. It's one thing to apologize; it's another thing to start taking actions in the right direction. If the person who hurt you is genuinely sorry in seeking to reconcile, be open to reconciling with them.

If there is true change on their part, start by slowly working to build back mutual trust, honor, respect, and understanding. If that goes well, you can gradually work on reestablishing a relationship.

Forgiveness is a complicated topic. Simply going through these five steps once may not do the trick, but if you continue to work through each of those steps each day, you'll begin to let go of bitterness and forgive. As you do, you'll notice wounds from your past starting to heal.

The Forgiveness Prayer

Forgiveness takes a lot of work. It's like a muscle you have to train. One of the best ways to work that muscle is through prayer. As we discussed, God wants to talk to you about everything, so why not speak to him about the bitterness you are still holding onto?

If you've never done anything like that, let me walk you through the process. Start by owning your unforgiveness. God already knows about it anyway; you may as well come clean. Just tell God that you are now aware that you've been holding onto bitterness and that you are ready to repent. Declare that you are ready to get rid of all hurts, anger, and bitterness so that you can finally forgive in Jesus name. Thank God for holding the wounds that the original incident caused and declare that you are giving up the right to judge and punish. When I do this, it sounds something like this:

"God, I'm ready to stop pretending like pain in my past is not affecting my present. Please forgive me for holding onto unforgiveness. Today, I declare I am getting rid of this unforgiveness and letting go of this hurt and anger. I completely forgive (name) in Jesus name, and I thank you that you are healing these wounds that were inflicted. I thank you that you are making me whole and setting me free. And I declare that I am giving up my right to judge or punish this person. I'm completely free. It's all in your hands now, in Jesus name, amen!

Your prayer doesn't need to sound exactly like that, but if you want to start getting rid of some anxiety and depression, stop ignoring your past pain. Talk to God about it. Take some grievances that you're holding onto (even if you've been holding on for years) and begin letting go. Start praying about your unforgiveness daily and watch the level of freedom in your life rise.

You can stop ignoring the pain in your past. You have permission to face it, feel it, and forgive it! You have permission to face it, feel it, and forgive it! You have permission to stop holding onto unforgiveness and find the freedom from anxiety and depression you deserve.

Chapter 12 – Performing For The Critics

When I listen to the critics, my anxiety skyrocketed. When I listen to my creator, the result was peace, joy, and confidence.

Peace, joy, and confidence is what every single one of us wants, isn't it? That's why we need to stop performing for our critics and begin listening to our Creator.

Earlier, I told you about my war chest – 20 promises from Scripture that I make a habit of proclaiming aloud when I need to start choosing to remember who God is and who he says I am. Now I want to share with you my five go-to verses for when I need to stop performing for critics. These are five truths my Creator says about me. Whenever critics start to talk, I immediately turn back to my creator.

I challenge you to do the same thing. Put these verses up on your mirror, make them the screensaver on your phone, or save them as a file on your computer. Every time a critic tries to talk about you, combat the negativity by reminding yourself what your Creator says about you!

So many mental health problems have been caused by constantly ruminating over the comments of critical people, so let these verses begin to settle your anxiety and lift you out of these pits of depression.

Verse #1: Psalm 139:13–14

"For You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvelous are Your works, and that my soul knows very well."

You may have surprised your parents, but you didn't surprise God. He knit you together perfectly and on purpose.

Verse #2: Ephesians 2:10

"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."

You aren't just okay; you are a masterpiece! When God made you, he called everyone over to say, "You've got to see this! Look at my boy. Look at my girl. That right there is a masterpiece!"

Verse #3: John 15:16

"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit – fruit that will last – and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you."

When I feel overwhelmed by my responsibilities in life and struggle with not feeling like I am enough, I remind myself that I didn't choose myself for this purpose – God chose me! Yes, I can raise this child. Yes, I can lead this organization. Yes, I can survive this tragedy. Yes, I can walk in my calling. Because the creator of the universe chose me!

Verse #4: 1 Thessalonians 5:24

"Attacking Anxiety" Book Summary

"He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it."

Not only did God call me, but he also does the heavy lifting for me. It's okay that I feel in over my head today. I'm going to give my anxiety permission to take a rest. Today, I'm going to worry less about whatever I'm going through. God's got it under control, and he will take care of it!

Verse #5: Romans 11:29

"For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable."

No matter how many times I've messed up, God's still got me. Even when my own critical voice in my head tries to say, "God has to be done with you by now!" I remind myself that he still loves me. He's still with me. And he has a calling for me because the plans God has for me have not expired or been revoked. They are irrevocable.

Today, you can decide to focus on the Word of God.

**Today, you can decide to focus on the truth that you were created on purpose, with a purpose.
You are a masterpiece. You are called. You are chosen. So walk in the plans that God has for you!**

Stop letting critical voices take you away from your calling, joy, or peace.

You can choose to stop performing for the critics. You can choose to stop listening to the critical voices giving you anxiety and depression. And you can choose to say yes to walking in confidence.

Chapter 13 – Comparing Your Calling

There is one last thing we all need to stop doing on our journey to freedom from anxiety and depression. I'm telling you, this last one is huge. It's a trap we all fall into in our own ways. And most of us don't even realize it. The good news is, once we recognize we are doing it and we get intentional about shutting it down, we have a fighting chance at finding freedom.

I'm talking about comparison. And if you are wondering what comparison has to do with anxiety and depression, the answer is everything. At least for me. There aren't many things in this world that pour gasoline on the anxiety and depression fire in my soul faster than comparison.

**Comparison leaves me feeling insecure. Not enough.
Insignificant. Void of purpose. Comparison is the thief of joy.**

Social media has turned into one big comparison game. And since our normal can't compete with other people's highlight reels, it leaves all of us feeling sad. And for a lot of us, it ultimately leads straight to depression.

Comparison ruins us. Or as the proverb puts it, "it rots the bones". And when we struggle with anxiety and depression, scrolling on social media just pours gasoline on a fire that already felt impossible to put out.

If we want to experience freedom from anxiety and depression, we need to stop comparing.

In his letter to Ephesus, Paul implored his friends to stop comparing their lives to others and instead begin valuing, appreciating, and being grateful for who they themselves were. "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10). We are God's workmanship! But every time we scroll, we fall into the comparison trap; we forget God crafted us and feel more like we can't measure up.

Guard Your Heart

God's Word says, "above all else, guard your heart" (Proverbs 4:23). Is that what you are doing? Take an honest look at your social media intake. As you go through your day, pay attention to how you watch other people and be honest with yourself about how it affects your life. Ask yourself, "is this good for me?" Am I spending more time looking over the fence at everyone else's life than simply valuing, appreciating, and celebrating mine?

I still use social media, but way less than I used to. In fact, at one point, I took a few months completely off. My soul felt so healthy, and my confidence began to rise. You'll know what's best for you. But above all else, "guard your heart" (Proverbs 4:23).

Remember, comparison is the thief of joy. But when we walk in the plans and purpose God has for us, we don't have time to compare – we are too busy creating our own lives. That's what fuels our souls and ushers in peace, joy, confidence, and freedom. Get in the habit of guarding your heart because the only way to experience joy is to stop trying to walk in the plans and purposes God has for somebody else.

Don't let comparison rob you of your calling.

Other people may appear to have it more together than you. They may have more followers. They may appear to be living the life you want to live. But they can't walk in your calling. That is reserved for you. And the day you start to believe that, anxiety and depression will flee. I challenge you right now to begin to embrace yourself exactly the way God made you and exactly where God has you. Begin to walk in your calling today with confidence because only you can be you today!

The goal is not just to stop unhealthy things but also to free you up to start filling that space with healthy things!

Jesus said it best: "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they might have life, and have it more abundantly" (John 10:10). When we stop doing all the things that steal, kill and destroy our lives, like pretending, performing, and comparing, we have way more space, energy, and capacity to start living the abundant life God has for us.

Sometimes in order to start we first have to stop.

When you are willing to do that, I'm telling you, anxiety and depression will start to lose their grip on your life, and you will begin walking in joy and confidence. And any time you see someone who appears to be doing better than you, you'll cheer them on and remind yourself – I can celebrate their calling, but I will walk in mine.

Chapter 14 – God Is With You

Truth #1: God Is With You

I'm sure you've realized just how real this fight for your freedom is. If you've been applying these principles, you've probably had some victorious moments, where it felt like you've taken ground and made serious moves in your battle against anxiety and depression.

But along the way, you've probably also had some not-so-great moments. As any fighter will tell you, you're never going to leave the ring without taking a few hits. This is a book about taking the fight to the enemy. The problem is, the enemy fights back. Some days may feel amazing and full of hope, like you are taking a step forward. But other days, it may feel like you are taking two steps back.

The good news is, even when you feel like you are losing some battles, we know that God's already won the war. So the final step to your fight for freedom from anxiety and depression is to talk about the three things you need to remember when it feels like this whole thing isn't working for you. The enemy loves to get in our heads and convince us we are losing ground, but when we can remember these truths, we can easily spot and expose the lies. Here are the three truths you need to remember:

1. God is with you.
2. God is working.
3. God has a plan.

We've been talking a lot about a guy named Joshua. Remember, he was the one who built the Memorial and marched around Jericho until the walls fell. But Joshua had to overcome many obstacles before the Israelites even got to Jericho.

We will now take a closer look at the events that led up to that victorious day in Jericho. As it turns out, God was at work the whole time. God was teaching Joshua how to remember the past so that he could be victorious in the present.

No matter how you are feeling right now, God is saying the same thing to you today as he did to Joshua. Even if you are at your absolute lowest point, let the God of the universe speak these words to you:

"Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go" (Joshua 1:9).

When God told Joshua to be strong and courageous, notice the source of the strength. God reminded Joshua that he was going with him. God would be with him every step of the way. Joshua's courage wasn't supposed to come from his own strength – it was meant to come from God's strength.

God had a purpose for him, even though Joshua couldn't fathom what that purpose was in the moment. God implored him to get up, dust himself off, and be strong and courageous.

You need to know the same thing right now, especially in the moments when you feel like you are losing ground. No matter how you feel today, you can be strong and courageous because God is going with you.

You don't need to know what is going to happen next. You don't need a full rundown of the plans. All you need to know is God is with you! He's right by your side. He'll be with you all day and all night, and when you wake up tomorrow, he'll still be right there. It doesn't matter how bad it gets – God's not going anywhere. Can you let God speak to you right now?

No matter how bad your anxiety or depression is, the God of the universe is saying: I am with you!

When we know our all-powerful Father is with us and has our backs, it changes everything.

It changes the way we walk. It changes the way we talk. It changes the way we feel. It changes the way we act.

When we remember God is going with us, it changes the entire game.

This should change the way you think about yourself today. This ought to change the way you talk, the way you walk, the way you act. The God of the universe is on your side!

Anxiety and depression may have picked on you your entire life. But once you know your heavenly Father has your back, suddenly this battle becomes a battle you can win. Not because you're strong enough but because your God is. And he's right there with you. You have to remember: Truth #1 – God is with you, even if you can't feel it.

Chapter 15 – God is Working

Truth #2: God is working – even if you can't see it.

When it feels like everything around you is falling apart, like every situation around you is going in the wrong direction, and everything that should be right feels wrong, remember – God is at work in your life.

Not because you can see it. Not because you can feel it. Not because you understand it. But because God's Word declares it. And God's Word trumps your feelings every single day. I'm telling you, no matter how you feel, remember: God is at work in your life right now!

Chapter 16 – God Has a Plan

Truth #3: God has a plan – even if you can't understand it.

In the middle of the fight, when it feels like we are losing just as much ground as we are gaining, it can feel almost impossible to believe this final truth. But it's God's truth, so no matter how we feel at any given moment, we have to learn how to stand on it.

In his Word, God reminded us, "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future" (Jeremiah 29:11).

But let's be honest – in the middle of the storm, it's so easy to lose sight of that truth. Remember the very first verse we started this journey with in the beginning. "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery" (Galatians 5:1)

Sometimes we need to put aside our temporary feelings and stand on God's permanent truths! Just because you can't see what God is up to doesn't mean he doesn't have a plan.

**God wants you to know right now, this is not the end. Your story and your life are not over.
He has plans and a hope and a future in store for you that will absolutely blow you away.**

If you are feeling down-and-out right now – I get it. If you've suffered a few blows and don't feel like fighting anymore, I get it. If you are ready to throw in the towel – trust me, I get it.

But just because you lose a few battles doesn't mean you are going to lose this war. God isn't done with you yet, not even close. Remember, the battle is not going to be easy. We have been talking about a fight because that's literally what this is – a battle for your freedom.

CONCLUSION – Your Time to Live Is Now!

God only uses broken people. God only uses broken leaders. Because what other kinds are there? It's okay to not be okay. We are all broken; we are just broken differently. Nobody gets to be perfect at anything until heaven.

Declaration – "When it comes to my anxiety and depression, I will continue to get healthier, better, and stronger every day, and I will continue to experience more and more peace, joy, confidence, and freedom in my life."

But I won't be perfect. And neither will you. If we sit around and wait until we are perfect before we begin walking in our God-given callings, we will never get off our couches. We don't have to have it all together before we begin pursuing our God-given dreams. Our time to start living is now!

We are all broken. And we can walk in our God-given callings today.

Both statements are true because our brokenness is the place where God meets us. That's where his power shows up and his grace is sufficient. That's where our lives and our dreams take place. Your time to live is now!

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.” 2 Corinthians 1:3-4

God does not waste anything. If you allow him, he will take your greatest pain and turn it into a platform-into an opportunity for you to help people.

The day you choose to look around the world and find some people who are struggling with the same thing you've struggled with, everything will begin to change. Look for ways to encourage them, inspire them, and walk with them. I guarantee your time and energy will be worth it. Even though you are still a work in progress, you can help people in ways you never thought possible. Which will bring you purpose, which will lead to peace, joy, hope, and confidence. And those things automatically begin to push away anxiety and depression. And the beauty of this is, it can all start today. Remember your time to live is now!

What you are experiencing right now is not going to be the end of your story. It might be an ongoing battle, but you will continually get better, healthier, and stronger. It might be a lifelong journey, but peace and joy and hope and confidence are on the way.

The next step is to realize God has given us some powerful weapons. We just need to start using them in the battle of overcoming anxiety and depression.

Worship is a weapon, and prayer is powerful. Start using them to fight back.

**You can't come face-to-face with the Word of God and the truth
about mental illness and not begin to see a transformation in your life.**

Shawn Johnson, Senior Pastor
Red Rocks Church
www.redrockchurch.com