

CYCLES, TRIGGERS & CONTENTMENT

KEY POINT: Being challenged is not a sign of failure. Challenges are a normal part of our mental health healing-recovery journey. Taking proactive steps and admitting your needs helps you manage difficulties and better maintain emotional stability.

SCRIPTURE STORY: The most famous first century Christian missionary, Paul, founded the first European church in the city of Philippi, Macedonia in modern day Greece. While under house arrest in Rome, between 60-62 CE, he wrote:

- ***"I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want"*** (Philippians 4:12 NIV)¹
- The word "content" here is the translation of the Greek word *autarkēs* (αὐτάρκης). This word also means self-sufficient and competent.
- Paul's self-sufficiency was not the result of an independent mindset. He regarded Christ Jesus as his source of peace, provision, and hope. This included his appreciation for the blessings and resources that came to him by way of others. (See Philippians 4:10-19)
- Paul had learned the secret of being content, self-sufficient, and competent in every situation through active practice rather than simply reacting passively to life. (See Philippians 4:6-9 / Chapter 10 Session)
- Learning how to be content, self-sufficient, and competent in every situation through active practice doesn't replace the need for medication or other therapies. The two may very well go hand in hand.
- Paul's example underscores that some skills are learned and maintained through regular practice and that the quality of contentment, self-sufficiency, and competency improve over time.

FACTS OF LIFE:

- **Episodic Illnesses:** Conditions like bipolar disorder, depression, and anxiety often have stable periods interrupted by symptoms. A rough day is usually just a brief setback, not a relapse.
- **Healing-Recovery Path:** The healing-recovery journey has ups and downs; short-term symptoms don't erase progress.
- **Coping Matters:** Use coping skills during difficult days instead of self-blame.
- **Early Action:** Seeing a bad day as temporary enables quick interventions — like self-care or seeking support — to help prevent setbacks.

SUGGESTION:

Keeping a diary or journal of record is highly beneficial for those of us with episodic or cyclical mental health challenges.

- It is a powerful, *evidence-based*, non-pharmacological tool for improving self-management, identifying triggers, and tracking symptoms over time.
- The assistance of a support partner in this process can further enhance the effectiveness of the record-keeping by providing external perspective and fostering accountability.²

NOTES:

REFLECTIVE PAUSE PROJECTS

TIMEOUT

Overcoming Survivors: During times of stability, common signs often appear that reveal a more difficult cycle (episode) is coming. Some of these signs include losing sleep or oversleeping, increased irritability, not eating or over-eating, racing thoughts or slower cognitive processing, or increased anxiety or nervousness.

Describe ways that you have experienced and seen these signs appear before a difficult episode.

Support Partners: During times of stability, common signs often appear that reveal a more difficult cycle (episode) is coming. Some of these signs include losing sleep or oversleeping, increased irritability, not eating or over-eating, racing thoughts or slower cognitive processing, or increased anxiety or nervousness.

Describe the signs you have seen appear before a difficult episode for your loved one.

TIMEOUT

Overcoming Survivors: Overwhelming stress can trigger our symptoms, affecting our stability and focus. These triggering situations (e.g., relational conflict, loud noises related to a traumatic event, financial problems, physical illness) also activate our brain and nervous system into a fight-or-flight-or-freeze response (i.e., triggered sympathetic nervous system).

Describe what the specific stressors or situations that seem to trigger your symptoms. Describe what happens and how you have learned to manage these triggers. Have you found joy (not necessarily happiness) in this self-management?³

Support Partners: Overwhelming stress can trigger our loved one's symptoms, affecting their stability and focus. These triggering situations (e.g., relational conflict, loud noises

related to a traumatic event, financial problems, physical illness) also activate their brain and nervous system into a fight-or-flight-or-freeze response.

Describe what the specific stressors or situations that seem to trigger your loved one's symptoms? Describe what happens and how they have learned to manage these triggers. Have they found joy (not necessarily happiness) in this self-management?²

TIMEOUT

Overcoming Survivors: Negative cycles can also be triggered by seasonal changes, events, or transitional times (e.g., holidays, an anniversary date related to stress or loss, end of a school semester). Thankfully, **these triggers can be predicted, and the effects can be minimized** (keep diary).

Structure and routine, including both our daily activity and weekly schedules, can help us maintain resiliency when we experience cyclical patterns and unpredictable triggering situations.

How do you specifically navigate seasonal changes or transitional times that you know tend to bring about more stress and difficulty?

Support Partners: Negative cycles can also be triggered by seasonal changes, events, or transitional times (e.g., holidays, an anniversary date related to stress or loss, end of a school semester). Thankfully, **these triggers can be predicted, and the effects can be minimized** (keep diary).

Structure and routine, including both our loved one's daily activity and weekly schedules, can help them maintain resiliency when they experience cyclical patterns and unpredictable triggering situations.

What are the most difficult times for your loved one and what type of plan do you have in place for those times?

TIMEOUT

Overcoming Survivors: Our cycles and triggers are related to our mental health difficulties and disorders. We are not failures in our faith or as a person because of them.

How have you found ways to remind yourself that the challenges you face because of your mental health difficulty or disorder are not the result of you failing God?

Support Partners: Our loved ones' cycles and triggers are related to their mental health difficulties and disorders. They are not failures in their faith or as a person because of them.

How have you found ways to remind yourself and your loved one that the challenges they face because of their mental health difficulty or disorder are not the result of failing God?

HEALTH / WELLNESS / WHOLENESS

(A revisiting of our chapter seven session.)

1. **Health is a reactive goal** that focuses on avoiding illness and maintaining body and mind function.
2. **Wellness is the daily journey** that involves choosing to achieve optimal health through beneficial spiritual practices, therapeutically helpful coping practices, appropriate intake of medication & nutrition, exercise, etc.
3. **Wholeness is the destination** that integratively embraces every part of yourself — including flaws and weaknesses — aligning with the core purpose to which you are called.
 - *“To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. ... For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God”* (Colossians 1:27; 3:3).
 - *“May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless [kept safe, sound, complete, and whole] at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it”* (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24).

THE BIG QUESTION: “DO YOU WANT TO BE WELL?”

In John 5:1–15, at the Pool of Bethesda in Jerusalem, Jesus encounters a man who had been crippled for 38 years. Jesus asks: **“Do you want to be made well?”**

Note: Seems like a silly question!

The man explains that he has no one to help him into the healing waters. Jesus commands him to **“Rise, take up your bed and walk.”** Instantly he was cured.

Lesson:

- (1) You must want to get better and actively work toward it.
- (2) Healing-recovery starts with the willingness to improve.
- (3) The process of healing-recovery helps health and eases disease, but a full cure is not promised in this life.

ENDNOTES

1. All Scripture references in Syllabus Twelve are from the New International Version (NIV) translation, unless otherwise indicated.

2. Google: **How to Journal for Mental Health / PsychologyToday**

(<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/conquering-codependency/202408/how-to-journal-for-mental-health#:~:text=You%20can%20write%20about%20anything,as%20water%20consumption%20or%20smoking>); Google: **The Power of Journaling**

During Mental Health Recovery / The Horsham Clinic

(<https://horshamclinic.com/blog/the-power-of-journaling-during-mental-health-recovery/#:~:text=This%20could%20be%20a%20trusted,healthy%20relationship%20with%20your%20mind.>)

Note: Evidence-Based Practice (EBP) refers to making decisions by integrating the best available research evidence, your doctor and therapists and other professional care clinical expertise, and your own personally unique values, preferences, and circumstances.

3. Psychologically and spiritually, happiness is often a temporary, external-driven emotion from good circumstances (happenstance events), while joy is a deeper, internal, enduring state of contentment, meaning, and resilience that can exist with adversity, activating brain areas for purpose and regulation, making it crucial for long-term mental well-being beyond fleeting moments.

Summary: Joy is a chosen, sustainable inner condition, whereas happiness is a fluctuating reaction to outside happenings, allowing joy to coexist with sadness, unlike fleeting happiness.

Google source document: **The Difference Between Joy and Happiness / embark BEHAVIORAL HEALTH** (<https://www.embarkbh.com/treatment/mental-health/joy-vs-happiness/>)

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