CARE RESOURCES @ROCK BRIDGE

I SHOULDN'T FEEL THIS WAY

NAME WHAT'S HARD, TAME YOUR GUILT, & TRANSFORM SELF-SABOTAGE INTO BRAVE ACTION

1) NAME WHAT'S HARD

Naming is a profound act of noticing, acknowledging, and validating the truth of what you're thinking and feeling at any given moment. You stop anxiously ruminating, impulsively reacting, or grasping for a solution and start paying attention to what's happening inside your own mind. Naming the truth empowers you to make a wiser choice.

NAMING QUESTIONS

Naming questions tend to start with "what". They encourage you to identify what you're experiencing without analyzing it or jumping to conclusions about it. When you notice an activated emotional state, ask yourself the following questions.

Name Your Experience

1. What am I feeling?
2. What thoughts do I notice?
3. What physical sensations am I aware of in my body?

Name the Precipitating Event

1. What happened?
2. What was I doing when I started feeling this way?
3. What past events might have contributed to my current reaction?

Merely assigning a name or label to what we feel literally calms down the activity of the emotional circuitry in the right hemisphere of the brain. The wonder of your design is that as you identify and name your experiences you bring order out of chaos.

MEPS CHECK-IN

You can do a check-in before any activity or conversation. It's a great tool for facilitating authentic connection. Simply think of one word to describe what you're experiencing in each of the categories below (examples provided).

- **M — mentally**: I'm confused.
- **E — emotionally**: I'm worried.
- **P — physically**: I'm rested.
- **S — spiritually**: I'm struggling.

God is the ultimate namer, one who names with incredible intention and tender authority (Genesis 1). As humans made in the image of God, we are also namers. Becoming a Namer means becoming someone who calls forth what is good, true, and beautiful in ourselves and in other people. It also means bravely naming painful experiences, toxicity, and injustices. When you name what's hard, you become the kind of person who brings real care to yourself and to other people.

2) FRAME YOUR REALITY

When you name something, you need time and space to metabolize it. You need to fully understand

how what's happening affects your heart, mind, and body. These are the in-between places you move through during periods of transition as you leave something behind and open yourself up to what might be ahead. A place in between helps you bridge from naming what's hard to braving a new path. It's where you do the work of framing; you develop a clearer understanding of your situation. Much of the work of framing unfolds beneath the surface, deep within your heart.

PLACES IN-BETWEEN

The goal is to cultivate the right conditions in your place in-between where you can unlock the creativity and insight of your God-made design. That includes engaging in calming activities and minimizing distractions as you gently place your attention onto a challenge. Take some deep breaths and apply the process of naming to what you're feeling. Here are some examples of activities that require some level of focus, but are also enjoyable, allowing your mind to relax and gain clarity.

- Enjoy a cup of coffee or tea in a favorite setting.
- Craft, knit, or make art.
- Hike or take a long walk.
- Take a drive.
- Garden, cook, or organize.
- Play an instrument or dance.
- Visit a church when no one else is there.
- Take a shower or bath.

F.R.A.M.E.

Framing is where you connect with the gentle whisper of God's Spirit. When you move into the work of framing a challenge, here's what you're trying to unearth: What is the actual problem here? What's my part? What's not my part? What are the obstacles? What has to be faced that can't be changed? What are the resources available to me? Use the following acronym to help you guide your framing process:

- **F — facts**: Clarify the different facts of the situation to help you gain objectivity.
- **R — roots**: Reflect on the deeper motives for change, as well as the deeper causes of the situation. Consider past events, such as childhood experiences.
- **A — audi**t: Review strategies you've tried in the past and assess if those actions have worked.
- **M — mental messages**: Examine your thoughts, feelings, and attitudes, as well as the expectations you've internalized. Consider alternative ways of thinking about the situation.
- **E — expansion**: Expand your understanding through research, expert opinions, or conversations with trusted friends. Imagine how you'd like to feel or draw a picture to gain insight.

THE LOOKING TOOL

This tool helps you understand how a problem fits into the larger story of your life.

Looking Back

- Have I faced a similar situation in the past?
- What strategies did I use to address it?
- What worked? What didn't work?

Looking at Today

- Envisioning my ideal future, what would progress look like 1 year, 5 years, or 10 years from now?
- What decisions would I regret 1 year, 5 years, or 10 years from now?
- What steps can I take now to align with my envisioned future?

When you consciously reject old, myopic ways of thinking and replace them with a more honest, whole, beautiful, and holy perspective in partnership with God's Spirit, you create a *holy reframe*. Brave actions flow from clear minds, and clear minds require places in between to honor all truth-pieces of what you're experiencing.

3) BRAVE A NEW PATH

When it comes to braving complicated situations, one of the most helpful frameworks to guide next steps is to consider the following three options:

- **Fight For It**: You might fight for something within yourself, healthier boundaries, a healthier relationship, or the health of your faith community.
- **Leave It**: You might determine that the best course of action is to leave something behind, such as a habit, coping tactic, harmful relationship, job, or group.
- **Suffer It Wisely**: Sometimes the choice is made for you, such as a health condition that you have to take brave steps to care for yourself or it might be a challenging job or relationship. You can't remove yourself entirely from the hurt, but you can work to mitigate further injury.

When you take one brave step in a clear direction, continue to name and frame as you move. Stay alert and attentive as you engage with each new truth-piece you encounter.

BRAVING A STEP

The acronym BRAVE can help you think of brave steps you might take. Consider different options in each of the following categories (examples provided).

- **B — boundaries**: Set clear limits to ensure your well-being.
  - Set external boundaries with a toxic behavior.
  - Set internal boundaries with a negative thought or attitude.
- **R — range**: Increase your repertoire of strategies for coping and self-soothing.
  - Learn grounding exercises to calm your nervous system.
  - Create a list of who is in your support system.
- **A — assertiveness**: Assert your preference or strengthen your voice.
  - Ask for something you need.
  - Take a self-defense class.
- **V — vitality**: Engage in activities that are life-giving.
  - Pick up a new hobby.
  - Celebrate a milestone or success.
- **E — environment**: Change the environment around you.
  - Choose a new gym or coffee shop.
  - Leave a home, church, or work environment.

When you're ambivalent about taking action, it's typically because both paths in front of you have power. As a result, you feel pulled in two different directions. If you struggle with ambivalence, don't be discouraged. Name it for what it is. Then use the ambivalence chart below to frame the different aspects of your situation and take one brave step in a new direction by the deadline you have chosen. The goal is movement … each brave step leads to more insight!

NAME, FRAME, & BRAVE AMBIVALENCE

- Name one or two options that are causing ambivalence in your decision-making process.
- Frame the pros and cons of each option by filling in the following chart.
- Circle the box that carries the most weight for you.
- Identify one brave step you can take based on the box you circled.

	PROS	CONS
OPTION 1		
OPTION 2		
NO CHANGE		

When you make a change, you often stir up old wounds that remind you of past mistakes or regrets. This is a normal part of growth. The trick is to honor feelings of regret even as you don't let them hinder the progress you are making. Guilt is an emotion, not necessarily a direct message from God. Therefore, braving guilt involves getting curious about it, just as you would any other feeling.

NAME, FRAME, & BRAVE GUILT

When guilt messages crowd your mind, name, frame, and brave your way to clear action steps.

- **Name**: What exactly do you feel guilty about?
- **Frame**: Ask yourself the following questions.
  - Did I do something wrong? Would an objective third party agree that I did something wrong? If you aren't sure, ask someone.
  - Did I hurt someone else as result of cruelty, impatience, selfishness, or anger? If so, you are likely feeling true guilt.
  - Did I hurt someone else as result of setting a healthy boundary or honoring my human limitations? If so, you are likely feeling false guilt.
- **Brave**: Identify an action step.
  - If you've identified true guilt, apologize to the person you hurt, make amends, or commit to growth.
  - If you've identified false guilt, identify one fact that counters the guilt message. For example:
  - I'm not helping out enough at church *becomes* I volunteer twice a month.
  - I'm not taking care of myself *becomes* I take a walk each day

An active faith means taking steps to change what you can change and taking responsibility for what's yours to work out. It also means bravely surrendering to the reality that you're not ultimately in power. A moment of surrender is quite possibly the bravest act there is, as we discover that's where God loves to enter in. You stop, breathe, and release your grip, and then you get back up.With God's help you take that next one brave step.

4) I SHOULDN'T FEEL STUCK IN MY HEAD

Our minds can be used brilliantly to solve the challenges we face. Those same minds can be used to keep us trapped, stuck, and duped into self-sabotage. The term cognitive dissonance is used to describe the discomfort or tension that arises when you hold conflicting beliefs or when what you value or believe doesn't line up with your actions. When you notice this inside of you, you have two choices. Your first option is to name it. The second option is refusing to name the inner tension. The discomfort of dissonance is a gift! But if you ignore or dismiss it, you'll wind up stuck in one of these thinking traps!

- **Denial**: When someone simply refuses to accept an inner tension.
- **Rationalization**: When we create excuses for behaviors we don't feel great about.
- **Minimization**: Involves downplaying the importance or significance of an event, situation, or behavior as a way of avoiding your own internal discomfort.
- **All-or-Nothing Thinking**: When you tell yourself that things are only one thing or another, without considering the nuances or middle ground where so many things actually find their name.
- **Negative Filters**: When you filter out the positive and see yourself only through a negative lens. "Should" Statements: When you use "should" statements to try to badger yourself into meeting an internalized set of expectations, the seeds. of which are often planted by other people.

FRAMING THINKING TRAPS

Framing thinking traps includes examining your thoughts challenging unhelpful beliefs, and cultivating a more intentional and empowered perspective on your life. Here are a few questions to begin with:

- Is that really true?
- Where did you pick up that belief about yourself?
- Is that a belief you want to keep?

Make it a regular practice to check in on your own thoughts each day. Identify a place in-between where you'll examine your thoughts on a consistent basis using one of these strategies:

- Journal each morning to become aware of the thoughts in your mind.
- Take a walk each day to intentionally reflect on what you're thinking about.
- Turn off the radio when driving in the car and pay attention to what's on your mind.
- Keep a daily thought inventory on your phone. Note different thoughts that persist.
- Work with a therapist to help you better understand your thinking patterns.

Here are examples of framing questions to ask yourself relative to the thinking traps you've identified:

- **Facts**: When do I notice myself getting defensive? Who or what tends to provoke defensiveness in me? When do I notice myself rationalizing a behavior, minimizing, or slipping into all-or-nothing thinking? How often do I notice "should" statements in my mind?
- **Roots**: Why am I inclined to think this way? Where did I learn this way of thinking? Why do I want to change?
- **Audit**: How is this way of thinking helping me? How is it hurting me?
- **Mental Messages**: What fear comes up if I were to consider changing this way of thinking?
- **Expansion**: What would I say to a child or loved one who was thinking this way? What are some holy reframes I could create?

Sometimes you need to outwit left-brain thinking traps by introducing them to your imagination. A great way is to ask questions that start with "What if":

- *What if* you could think about this in a different way?
- *What if* it's neither the worst-case scenario nor the best? What if it's somewhere in between?
- *What if* this compliment were true?
- *What if* you told the truth?

Thankfully, thinking traps don't work. The truth always finds its way out, if you're willing to do the work of naming, framing, and braving.

NAME, FRAME, & BRAVE DISSONANCE

- **Name**: What is an area of dissonance you notice inside? Which thinking trap (denial, rationalization, minimization, all-or-nothing thinking, negative filters, or "should" statements) are you most tempted to use to justify the dissonance?
- **Frame**: What are the facts of the situation? Write a "two things can be true" holy reframe based on those facts.
- **Brave**: What is a step you can take to honor the whole truth of the situation?

When you work through thinking traps, you're engaging a scientifically backed process rooted in cognitive behavioral therapy. The adaptation of this process (above) includes noticing what you're telling yourself (naming), reflecting on that (framing), and then actively working to change the way you respond to a situation (braving). You might think of this work as what the apostle Paul wrote: "Take every thought captive."

5) I SHOULDN'T FEEL LIKE NUMBING MY EMOTIONS

Most people struggle with some type of numbing behavior, and beating themselves up for it. The truth is you probably weren't taught how to cope with painful emotions or stress in healthy ways. Our hearts, minds, and bodies ache for care and attention, but counterfeit versions of comfort are everywhere. There is no shame in numbing. It's often a survival skill, but it is a reality that we need to name and bravely face. Here are common examples of activities that can quickly turn into numbing behaviors.

- eating
- watching TV or movies
- browsing social media
- working
- helping others
- spending
- using substances

When you do these mindfully, they can be a means to connect with others, spark imagination, or cope with stress. Problems arise when otherwise healthy activities become numbing behaviors instead of tending to the needs of your heart. You're not naming what's hard and coping with it. You're numbing.

When you start to name your numbing behaviors, be gentle with yourself. Name them in your journal or to God. And when you do name them to someone else, ensure it's someone who will handle this naming with the care it deserves. The good news is that once you've named a numbing behavior, you're in a much better position to change it. You can frame it and brave toward healthier coping tactics.

FRAMING NUMBING BEHAVIORS

When you reflect on your numbing behaviors with someone who loves you and wants the best for you, it can help your progress exponentially. Here are some questions to ask yourself when you're framing numbing behavior.

- **Facts**; When do I numb? Is it late at night, during the workday, or on the weekend? How often does it happen?
- **Roots**: What triggers the numbing? Why do I want to change?
- **Audit**: What have I tried in the past to stop numbing? What worked? What didn't work?
- **Mental Messages**: What shaming messages do I tell myself about numbing? How can I reframe those messages in a compassionate way?
- **Expansion**: What are some proven ways of reducing this numbing behavior?

You can also use the Looking Tool to reflect on the size and scope of the numbing behavior:

- **Looking Back**: How long has this numbing behavior been a problem for me? Is it new or is it something I've done for a long time?
- **Looking at Today**: What are other ways I can soothe or comfort myself?
- **Looking Ahead**: What would my life look like without this numbing behavior? What would change?

Reflecting on these will give you a bigger picture of your numbing behavior, gain insight into the events or emotions that are triggering it, and help you identify brave steps to change your numbing behavior.

The goal of braving is to reduce the numbing behavior and replace it with a more beneficial option. You might fight for a healthier relationship with a numbing behavior (i.e enjoy it in moderation, enjoy it with other people), suffer it wisely for a clear reason (i.e. listen to audiobook instead of TV at night, set a timer), or leave it behind entirely (i.e. brave a detox). No matter which choice you make, you'll need to expand your range of healthy ways to care for yourself. Here's the good news: you can learn to replace numbing behaviors with the care you actually need!

BRAVING CARE

Choose several activities from each of the following categories. Practice caring for yourself in these ways when you notice an urge to numb.

- **Relational Care**: Talking with a safe friend, attending a support group, spending time with family, playing with children, or enjoying animals can provide comfort, empathy, or understanding
- **Sensory Care**: Listening to music, lighting a candle, wrapping up in a blanket, or immersing yourself in a beautiful setting can soothe your senses and evoke feelings of calm, warmth, and contentment.
- **Recreational Care**: Gardening, cooking, painting, playing sports, or watching a movie can help you process negative emotions and inspire creativity.
- **Spiritual Care**: Praying, meditating, reading Scripture, or singing songs of praise can bring solace, perspective, and encouragement.

Naming, framing, and braving numbing behaviors is attuning to the intricacies of your mind, heart, and body and learning what brings you comfort, relief, peace, or delight. It's turning toward the goodness your soul craves, the goodness all around you.

6) I SHOULDN'T FEEL ASHAMED OF MY BODY

Many people don't know how to live in their bodies. We know we "should" care for our bodies, but so

often our guilt messages become the only messages we tell ourselves. Your body encases your soul with skin and hair, and serves as your visible presence in the world. It's also intimately involved in all your decisions, as well as processing feelings of fear, joy, pain, and stress. In order to heal, we need to build a healthier framework through which to view our bodies.

FRAMING YOUR BODY IN A NEW WAY

As you frame a new way of viewing your body, consider the following questions:

- **Facts**: What was I taught about my body? Where did I learn those messages?
- **Roots**: Why does the way I view my body matter?
- **Audit**: When have I felt connected to my body in a healthy way? When have I felt shame or frustration with my body?
- **Mental Messages**: What messages do I tell myself about my body? How do I think God sees my body?
- **Expansion**: What are other perspectives about my body I'd like to learn?

You can also use the Looking Tool to capture a bigger picture of how you've related to your body.

- **Looking Back**: How did I feel about my body as a child? As a teen?
- **Looking at Today**: How do I feel about my body now?
- **Looking Ahead**: How would I like to feel toward my body 5 years from now? 10 years from now? 20 years from now? What would progress look like?

As you reflect, it's crucial to *create and practice holy reframes*. For example, what if you could begin to consider new names for your body, like these?

- Instead of exhausted: *My body needs care.*
- Instead of weak: *My body is intricate and nuanced.*
- Instead of broken: *My body is healing.*
- Instead of ugly: *My body is beautifully made.*
- Instead of old: *My body is wise.*
- Instead of scarred: *My body is resilient.*

Intentionally reframing the way you view your body is a brave step. When you notice shaming self-talk, gently redirect your thoughts to a holy reframe. Over time, you'll begin to experience your body as a sacred vessel. The goal is to fully inhabit your body by attuning to the big and small signals it sends you each day. Do that by noticing and responding to the various cues it is sending, such as fatigue, tension, hunger, or an increased heart rate. Each of these represents more than a physical state—it's also a clue to your emotional state and your environment. In other words, you attune to your whole being.

BRAVING A CALM NERVOUS SYSTEM

Through developing an awareness of the signals your body is sending, you can learn to calm your nervous system. Here are a few research-backed exercises to add to your range of braving steps.

- **Deep Breathing**: Take a deep breath all the way into your belly. A common method is the 4-7-8 technique—inhale for 4 seconds, hold your breath for 7 seconds, and exhale for 8 seconds. Then repeat the cycle a few times.

- **Guided Imagery**: Imagine a safe place in your mind. You might imagine a beach, with the sound of waves crashing and the feel of sun on your skin. You might imagine yourself standing on a mountain peak, feeling the cool breeze, or in a safe, protective space, like a cozy cabin where you feel entirely secure and at ease.
- **Grounding Exercises**: Connect to your five senses. You might run cold water over your hands or slowly tense and untense different muscles in your body. You might slowly and consciously become aware of what you can see, hear, smell, touch, and taste from where you're sitting or standing.
- **Nature Bathing**: Get outside without your phone. Stroll through a park, botanical gardens, or walk down a tree-lined street. If possible, visit a body of water or go to the mountains. Research shows at least 20 minutes outdoors three days a week without technology improves your well-being.

To love God means to love the body God gave you. To love your body is a part of what it means to honor God. Each morning, you might practice naming, framing, and braving a new message, a love note to your body: *My body is precious. My body helps me make wise decisions. My body is valued by God.* What if this act of honoring your body **is** a spiritual practice?

6) I SHOULDN'T FEEL LESS THAN OTHER PEOPLE

Although comparison can sometimes be healthy and even inspire or motivate you to make positive changes, it can also have negative effects, such as lowering self-esteem, increasing depression, and promoting a self-sabotaging mentality. The difference between constructive comparison and unhealthy comparison is in the fruit it bears. Unhealthy comparison produces negative results. Constructive comparison is empowering—it motivates you to become your best self.

BRAVING CONFIDENCE

Try the following steps as you brave confidence, which is simply honoring the gifts you have, no matter how big or small they might seem to you.

- **Identify Your Strengths and Talents**: Consider what you're naturally good at, what you enjoy, and what others compliment you on. If you're feeling uncertain you might use a formal assessment tool, such as StrengthsFinder.
- **Seek Input**: Ask trusted friends or coworkers what strengths they see in you.
- **Advance Your Skills**: Take a class or read a book to help you hone a talent you enjoy.
- **Practice Gratitude**: Make a list of three things you're proud of in yourself each day. Write it on a sticky note and put it where you can see it. Give thanks to God for these gifts.

As you take braving steps to honor your own gifts and talent, notice what emotions you feel. Your goal is to become the best version of who *you* are. True humility celebrates the gifts of others *and* delights when you shine your own light.

NAME, FRAME, & BRAVE COMPARISON

- **Name**: Recall a recent situation that evoked. negative feeling of comparison in you.
- **Frame**: What messages are you telling yourself about this situation?
    - Are you self-critical? (*I should have been better.*)
    - Do you notice guilt messages? (*I shouldn't feel this way.*)
    - Do you feel envy? (*I want what they have.*)
    - Do you notice self-doubt? (*I'll never be good enough.*)

    - Write a holy reframe for each message you notice.
        - *I wasn't my best, **and** I can learn and grow from this experience.*
        - *I can honor their happiness, **and** I can honor my sadness.*
        - *I can acknowledge their success, **and** I can clarify the good things I want.*
        - *I'm not where I want to be, **and** I'm precious to God as I am.*
- **Brave**: Identify and take one proactive step to invest in your own dream, growth, or God-given longing.

The solution to the problem of comparison is to honor what's legitimately frustrating *and* take brave steps to focus on developing your own gifts.

7) I SHOULDN'T FEEL TRAPPED IN TOXICITY

Toxic strategies are designed to keep you feeling confused, stuck, and doubtful of yourself. Please do not beat yourself up for feeling these ways. Instead, you can equip yourself to disentangle from toxicity and brave the health and goodness you deserve. Here are some of the most common types of toxic behaviors to be on the lookout for.

- **Control & Manipulation**: People take advantage of a tender heart, an empathetic spirit, or a loyal nature and exploit those qualities in direct, overt ways by dictating the way you should think or act (i.e. "*I'm doing this for your own good.*"). Someone might try to control your behavior in more indirect, covert ways through forms of manipulation (i.e. "*If you really loved me, you would …*").
- **Triangulation**: This occurs when one person pulls you into the middle of a conflict with a third person. This traps you in the middle, which creates dissonance and turmoil inside. The problem is you've been put in the middle of a problem that you don't have the power to solve.
    - When you name triangulation for what it is, you can take action to stop it by asserting yourself: "I'd prefer you talk to that person directly." You can also set a healthy boundary: "If you bring this person up again, I'll remove myself from the conversation."
    - There are healthy ways to seek third-party counsel that do not involve triangulation:
        - **Name what's happening**: "I need some advice about a hard situation."
        - **Ask permission**: "Are you available, and do you have the capacity to help me?"
        - **Clarify the boundaries**: "I'm not asking you to fix this. I'm asking for you to help me see it clearly so I can take steps to resolve the situation."
- **Blame Shifting**: People put the blame on someone else for their problems instead of taking responsibility themselves. Blame shifting creates a confusing atmosphere of half-truths and deception, making it hard to discern what's real.
- **Verbal Abuse**: This includes the use of derogatory language, insults, or threats to belittle or degrade someone. A more indirect form is constant criticism, when someone continually undermines you, points out perceived flaws, or criticizes your actions, appearances, or abilities.
- **Gaslighting**: This is when someone manipulates you by questioning your words or your perception of reality—their goal is to make you feel crazy, weak, or dependent. Gaslighting involves two components: deception and projection. Gaslighters lie to protect themselves, then go on the attack to disempower you.
- **Physical or Sexual Abuse**: Physical abuse is the intentional use of physical force to hurt, intimidate, punish, or threaten someone. Sexual abuse refers to any nonconsensual sexual contact or behavior. Your mind, heart, soul, and body are worthy of dignity and respect, and you deserve so much more!

FRAMING TOXIC BEHAVIORS

If you're experiencing toxicity, ask yourself the following questions to help you frame the impact:

- **Facts**: *How often does the behavior occur? When does it occur?*
- **Roots**: *When did the behaviors start? How did I respond to the behaviors initially?*
- **Audit**: *Have I tried to address the behaviors? What happened?*
- **Mental Messages**: *Do I frequently feel uncomfortable, belittled, or drained after time with this person? What guilt or shame messages do I tell myself?*
- **Expansion**: *Have others in my life mentioned concerns about this person's behavior? What do experts say about the behaviors?*

You can also use the Looking Tool to assess the big picture of your relationship:

- **Looking Back**: *Have I ever experienced a healthy relationship with this person? If so, what were the circumstances?*
- **Looking at Today**: *On a scale of 1 to 10, how content am I with the current relationship? What fears do I have about changing how I show up in this relationship?*
- **Looking Ahead**: *What would progress look like 1 year, 5 years, or 10 years from now? What decisions would I regret 1 year, 5 years, or 10 years from now?*

Naming what's hard is a gift you give to yourself and to others. Naming creates an opportunity for both parties—yourself and the other person—to brave a different path. You release the other person to make their own choices, and you free yourself to pursue the healing and goodness that lies ahead.

- You can love someone **and** leave a relationship.
- You can forgive someone **and** maintain firm boundaries.
- You can value someone **and** refuse to engage in their toxicity.

8) I SHOULDN'T FEEL MAD AT MY LOVED ONE

We all experience mixed feelings toward our loved ones, and out loved ones experience mixed feeling toward us. Those feelings—when named and framed—help us brave a healthier way for the benefit of everyone. The first step to relational health is to recognize and name the barriers we all unintentionally put up. Healthy relationships start inside you as you work through your own thinking traps.

- **Assumptions & Mind Reading**: Instead of allowing people to speak on their own behalf, you make assumptions about their motives or attempt to read their mind. This causes you to jump to conclusions or act based on your mind reading, completely miscalculating the situation's reality.
- **Projection**: When you project onto someone, you attribute your feelings or thoughts onto them, which complicates an already complicated situation. Instead of naming what's hard inside and taking responsibility, you misname someone else's feelings, creating a barrier to relational health.
- **Personalization**: This barrier involved taking things personally or assigning blame to yourself without any logical reason or evidence that you are to blame. This can make it challenging to have practical or meaningful conversations.
- **Greener Grass**: This barrier goes like this: "I need someone more (affirming, fun, etc.)." When left unchecked, this creates a barrier to cherishing the good qualities that your loved one does have.

NAMING & FRAMING COMPLICATED FEELINGS

The trick to staying on the clear path ahead is to name what's hard honestly while simultaneously honoring the good that you see. Start by naming what's hard inside of you Here are some examples:

- *I feel alone when he works all the time.*
- *I feel anxious when she shuts me out.*
- *I wish he were more fun.*

Give yourself some time to simply feel it. Linger there a moment. You're simply attuning to what's happening inside you. As you move down this naming path, you're slowly entering into a place in between where you're reflecting more deeply on this situation—you're starting the work of framing. Next, gently start asking yourself: *What do I need in this moment? What is a longing of my heart?*

- *I need more help. I need to feel like I'm valued and cherished.*
- *I need to feel like I'm doing all I can.*
- *I need more laughter and fun. I long for more adventure.*

You don't have to fix it yet. Notice what it's like to be present to a longing. You're in that place where God always meets his children, that place of simple, childlike awareness. And when you're ready, you regain access to what's also true about the other person.

- *I respect his work ethic, even when he drives me crazy.*
- *I cherish her private nature. It's so hard to parent.*
- *I'm grateful for his loyalty, even though I long for more adventure.*

And you create a bigger frame, a holy reframe that accounts for all the different pieces. Here's what that might look like, when two things can be true:

- *I love his work ethic. I need more of his attention.*
- *I love her private nature. I need to tell her I'm worried.*
- *I love their _____ . I need _____ .*

The work of naming and framing your complicated emotions kick-starts the creativity you'll need to brave your next steps!

BRAVING THE CROSSROADS WITH YOUR LOVED ONE

It's brave to leave behind behaviors that create barriers to healthy communication. It's brave to fight for change. It's also brave to decide if you're going to suffer it wisely at this time, staying attentive to your own emotions, trusting the timing and the process. Here are some examples of these braving options.

Leaving It Behind

You first might brave the work of leaving behind old ways of relating that don't serve you anymore. For example, you might leave behind mind reading or taking things personally. Instead, practice the skill of "just ask", by saying any of the following:

- *"I noticed you were quiet the other evening. Was anything wrong?"*
- *I'm curious. You're spending a lot of time here. Are you doing that for you or are you doing that for us?"*
- *"I'd love to understand what you were thinking when you said that. it landed kind of funny on me."*

You can also "just ask" when it comes to asking for support. Instead of silencing, just ask: "I'm struggling today. Are you available to talk?" Either way, you're empowering both yourself and your loved one to ask for help and state limits honestly.

If it's tempting for you to project your feelings onto others, practice identifying your own feelings with a person who has proven safe for you.

- *"I want to be present for you, and I'm also a little bit distracted right now."*
- *"I'm so happy for you, and I'm also honestly a little jealous."*

You can leave behind the tendency to long for "greener grass." Honor the good qualities they do have *and* work to get your own needs met in healthy ways. One braving strategy is to develop the "rolodex approach", which means creating a network of people you can contact for different needs. By identifying several sources of support, you can adjust the expectations you have for one single person and enjoy the richness of diverse perspectives and attributes of different kinds of people.

Suffering It Wisely

Sometimes you choose to brave "sitting on your wisdom" and wait to initiate a change in your relationship. Maybe you want to give the situation more time, get yourself into a better place emotionally or choose to wait until the other person is in a better place emotionally. What's important is that you do not bypass what you feel. You can give space *and* honor the reality that you are making a sacrifice for the relationship. Here are some examples of promises to build trust while you wait:

- *I'm not going to speak up now. But if (behavior) happens again, I will.* Write a script so you're prepared.
- *I'm not going to say anything now. But I will set a boundary the next time we get together.* Define the boundary you will set for yourself.
- *I'm going to ask a trusted third party how they would view the situation. I will make my decision after that conversation.* Schedule the appointment with your trusted advisor.

NAME, FRAME, & BRAVE CONFLICT

Most of us are adept at conflict avoidance. When you're tempted to avoid conflict, name, frame, and brave your way to clear action steps.

- **Name**: What is a challenging topic you need to address with your loved one?
- **Frame**: Ask yourself the following framing questions:
  - *Why am I fearful about raising the issue? Am I afraid of damaging a relationship? Facing criticism? Now being able to articulate my thoughts effectively?*
  - *What strategies have I used in the past to handle conflict? How effective were they?*
  - *What is the worst that could happen if I raise the topic? How likely is it?*
  - *What positive outcomes could arise from addressing the conflict?*
- **Brave**: Identify a braving step based on your answers.
  - Seek help drafting a script. Role-play with a trusted advisor.
  - Practice techniques to stay calm, such as deep breathing or guided imagery.
  - Identify a way to honor yourself after the conversation. No matter the outcome, celebrate that you took a brave step!

Fighting For Change

When you fight for change, you initiate a conversation with the other person. Here are some examples of how you can set yourself up well fro a successful conversation:

- "No one did anything wrong, and we need to talk about _____. Is now a good time for you?"
- "I love seeing you, and I'm needing to be more intentional with my time. Are you open to a discussion about our schedules?"

- "I trust that you didn't intend to hurt me, and that statement hurt me. I need you to know this because I care about our relationship."

When you lead with positivity, there is a sense of closeness rather than conflict. As you name, frame, and brave complexity in relationships, each truth-piece becomes a treasured part of the larger story.

9) I SHOULDN'T FEEL CONFLICTED ABOUT GOD

You may have been taught to bypass the complex feelings you experience. Spiritual bypassing ignores the richness and complexity of your God-given design. Instead of carefully working through the different layers of a complicated problem, you might try to force-fit a spiritual pseudo solution. For example, you might tell yourself things like the following:

- *All I need is prayer!*
- *Forgive and forget. That's the best way to approach this situation.*
- *Let go and let God.*

When you're conflicted inside, it's tempting to default to a subtle form of overspiritualizing. Instead of engaging your mind, the tools God has given you, and spiritual resources, you project your decision-making onto God, giving him too much responsibility for the decisions you are making. Oftentimes, other people encourage you to spiritually bypass—they assume all your problems can be solved with a spiritual solution. As a result of that inner tension, you resort to unhealthy coping strategies:

- **Self-gaslighting**: telling yourself you don't feel what you really feel
- **Numbing**: suppressing your emotions instead of working to cope with them
- **Magical thinking**: disregarding reality and denying yourself the opportunity to discover practical solutions

God doesn't ask you to bypass the conflicting emotions you face. What if those feelings are an opportunity to brave even deeper growth and healing? You're never closer to God than when you're naming what's hard. You're telling the truth, and telling the truth is God's sweet spot.

NAMING & FRAMING COUNTERFEIT MESSAGES ABOUT GOD

Counterfeit, simplistic versions of otherwise beautifully rich spiritual concepts are rampant. Naming those messages helps you tame them. Here are some of the most common counterfeit messages and some ways to reframe them.

- **I should feel happy in my suffering**. This encourages a false version of joy. *The truth is that* joy is a complex emotion intimately linked with experiences of sadness, grief, and pain.
- **If I had more faith, I wouldn't be struggling**. This pressures you to project an image of being "blessed" as evidence of your faith. *The truth is that* faith is no guarantee against suffering.
- **I should just die to my self**. This promotes a false version of sacrifice, encouraging you to disregard toxicity or boundary violations instead of working to protect and care for yourself. *The truth is that* sacrifice is a delicate balance of selflessness and self-respect.
- **I should always feel content**. This promotes a false version of peace. *The truth is that* acknowledging frustrations or areas of discontent can help you grow and change aspects of your life.
- **I should forgive and forget**. The counterfeit version of forgiveness encourages you to minimize or overlook legitimate wrongs. *The truth is that* acknowledging hurt and injustice is critical to ensuring that resentment and bitterness don't fester in your soul.

- **I'm a terrible sinner!** The counterfeit version of confessing sin induces shame, false guilt, or control. *The truth is that* when you name the imperfections you see in yourself honestly in a loving environment, you find freedom, acceptance, and belonging.

SPIRITUAL FRAMING QUESTIONS

- **Facts**: *What counterfeit messages have I believed?*
- **Roots**: *Where did I pick up these messages? When did I start to believe them?*
- **Audit**: *Are these messages true? Do they yield spiritual fruit in my life? (i.e. fruit of the Spirit)*
- **Mental Messages**: *What messages do I tell myself about how God views me? What messages do I tell myself about how God wants me to treat others?*
- **Expansion**: *What do passages from the Bible say about these messages? What are some different ways of interpreting those passages?*

So much of authentic faith is leaning into the paradox that two things really are so very often true.

- *I trust you God*, AND *I'm scared.*
- *I want to forgive*, AND *I need to protect myself.*
- *I'm grieving*, AND *I'm also healing.*

It takes work to name and frame old messages and brave a more whole, more resilient, sturdier faith. But the good news is that as you align yourself with all of what's true, you start working with the grain of God's universe, including the grain of the universe God has placed inside of you.

BRAVING HOLISTIC SPIRITUAL PRACTICES

The antidote to spiritual bypassing is to brave a holistic relationship with God that includes all of your being, including the complexity of your thoughts and emotions. Here are some examples of braving steps you might take.

Whole Body Prayer

Many of us have the idea that praying means sitting quietly with our heads bowed and eyes closed. But what if you incorporated your whole being into your prayer, including your thoughts, feelings, and even your body? As you mind your mind while cooking, gardening, walking, or driving to work, consider inviting God into the process of attuning to your thoughts.

- *"I'm worried about my child, my health, my bills. Help me to think clearly about what's really going on, God. Be with me as I work to get to the root of my fear."*
- *"I'm wrestling with anger. I'm frustrated that this person is getting away with harmful behavior, God. I'm not willing to be harmed anymore. Lead my thoughts as I consider how to protect myself."*

You might incorporate conversations with God into the recreational, sensory, or physical activities you do. For example, when you become aware of painful emotions, consider walking outside, eyes wide open, and naming what you notice as an act of praise.

- *"I see that mountain, God. It reminds me of your strength."*
- *"That tree is beautiful, God. I t reminds me that all seasons pass."*

When your nervous system is activated, it can be hard to pray in the way most of us have been taught. it's helpful to calm your nervous system as you articulate what you feel or what you need.

- "*God, I'm struggling.*" (deep breath)
- "*I know you're with me.*" (deep breath)
- "*I need you.*" (deep breath)

God designed your body to release endorphins and good chemicals when you breathe, sing, experience nature, or move. Incorporating any of these activities as you name what's hard with God helps you soothe your nervous system.

Braving Healing Communities

What if we all learned to name together honestly? What if we lovingly attuned to each other's struggles instead of fixing them? As we name together without shame, we become a more truer, beautiful oasis—an embodied experience of Christ—for each other. In safe contexts like these, we can also brave naming our own sin, shortcomings, and secrets without fear of shame entering in.

As a result of being seen and known by a loving community, we grow stringer and steadier, surer of ourselves, our convictions, and our purpose. We develop a deeper sense of integrity within ourselves, with others, and with the one who made us.

A Deeper Faith

When you do the work to navigate uncertainty, process disappointments, and grieve painful experiences with God, you become stronger, wiser, and more resilient, even as you tap into a broader range of spiritual practices. You don't have to choose between honoring yourself and the God who made you. The choice is a false dichotomy. Instead, you can connect to yourself *and* to God honestly. You can name what's hard *and* claim your hope. You can honor conflicting feelings *and* honor the depth of your faith.

This resource was adapted from "I Shouldn't Feel This Way", by Dr. Alison Cook. Please read the book for a more thorough and helpful understanding of how change starts when you stop beating yourself (and others) up for the way that you feel and instead say, "I do feel this way! And I'm going to do something about it."