

**Personal Reflection**  
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Anxiety, anger, and escapism are *common* life problems, in both senses of ‘common’: everyday, every person. They are sins endemic to the human condition and to our struggle. And they are doorways through which the grace and mercies of Jesus Christ daily invade lives.

This life, therefore, is not righteousness but growth in righteousness, not health but healing, not being but becoming, not rest but exercise.

We are not yet what we shall be but we are growing toward it.

The process is not yet finished but it is going on.

This is not the end but it is the road.

All does not yet gleam in glory but all is being purified.

- Martin Luther

In each case, we see three things:

1. It feels like we have good reasons to react with sinful anxiety, hostility, and escapism. The pressures, heat, difficulties, threats, frustrations, wrongs, beguilements of life come at us – and reveal what rules our hearts.
2. God gives better reasons, truer reasons, deeper reasons, imperishable reasons – Himself, reclaiming our hearts – that we learn to respond with faith working through love.
3. The inworking and outworking of faith and love produces the holy anxiety of caring concern (wrapped within deep trust). Faith works through love to produce just anger (wedded to generous mercies). Faith works out into a right longing to escape trouble and to help others in their troubles (alongside hearty enjoyment of innocent pleasures).

We’ve laid out a model, a picture, a map of the terrain of battle. A map is useful for orienting you, but it does not get you there. Our goal is to *relate* to our God honestly, intelligently, believably, in ways that change us in real time, real place, real problem.

1. **Take one** of these three common sins to face and tackle this day. Your Father is the vinedresser, putting his pruning shears into your life:  
“Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there is any hurtful way in me; and lead me in the everlasting way” (Ps. 139:23f).
2. Whichever of the common deviancies you’re choosing, first **read and ponder these hymns** (and, if you’re so moved, sing with heart and voice!). Notice how we’ve parsed the hymns,
  - The pressures of life are described in *italics*, those things (‘good reasons’) that provoke us to anxiety, anger, escapism. These are the circumstances within which our battle plays out.
  - The Lord’s promises and self-disclosures come in **bold**, these invitations (‘better reasons’) to live differently. These are ways the Redeemer enters human life. Notice

how these things that God says compete with the voices and pressures that woo and provoke us towards anger/grumbling, fear/anxiety, escapism/addiction.

- Our responses of faith are underlined. This is the heart of change.

Read all the italics. Then read all the bolds. Then read all the underlinings. Then worship.

Jesus, what a friend for sinners

**Jesus! What a friend for sinners! Jesus! Lover of my soul;**  
*Friends may fail me, foes assail me, He, my Saviour, makes me whole.*

[refrain] Hallelujah! What a Saviour! Hallelujah, what a friend!  
**Saving, helping, keeping, loving, He is with me to the end.**

**Jesus! What a strength in weakness! Let me hid myself in Him;**  
Tempted, tired, and sometimes failing, **He, my strength, my vict'ry wins.**

**Jesus! What a help in sorrow! While the billows o'er me roll,**  
*Even when my heart is breaking, He, my comfort, helps my soul.*

**Jesus! What a guide and keeper! While the tempest still is high,**  
*Storms about me, night o'er takes me, He, my pilot, hears my cry.*

**Jesus! I do now receive You, more than all I You I find.**  
**You have granted me forgiveness, I am Yours, and You are mine.**

**Jesus! I do now receive You, more than all in You I find,**  
**You have granted me forgiveness, I am Yours, and You are mine.**

Hallelujah! What a Saviour! Hallelujah, what a friend!  
**Saving, helping, keeping, loving, You are with me to the end.**

How firm a foundation

**How firm a foundation, you saints of the Lord,  
Is laid for your faith in His excellent Word!  
What more can He say then to you He has said,  
To you who for refuge to Jesus have fled?**

**“Fear not, I am with you, O be not dismayed;  
I am your God, and will still give you aid;  
I’ll strengthen you, help you, and cause you to stand,  
Upheld by My righteous, omnipotent hand.**

*“When through the deep waters I call you to go,  
the rivers of sorrow shall not overflow;  
For I will be with you your troubles to bless,  
and sanctify to you your deepest distress.*

*When through fiery trials your pathway shall lie,  
My grace, all sufficient, shall be your supply;  
The flame shall not hurt you; I only design  
your dross to consume, and your gold to refine.*

*“E’en down to old age all My people shall prove  
My sovereign, eternal, unchangeable love;  
And when hoary hairs shall their temples adorn,  
like lambs they shall still in My bosom be borne.*

The soul that on Jesus has leaned for repose,  
**I will not, I will not desert to his foes;**  
**That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake,**  
**I’ll never, no, never, no, never forsake.**

## Anxiety

1. Ponder the following passage from Psalm 94.

“When my anxious thoughts multiply within me, your consolations delight my soul”  
(Psalm 94:19).

Read it over 3-4 times. Take it slowly. Emphasize different words and phrases. Where do you tend to misfire regarding worry, fear, uncertainty, obsession? What most strikes you now as you think about how this voice of faith talks about his experience of both anxiety and the Lord?

2. Now work through our six questions.

**Situation:** What circumstances tend to arouse *your* specific worries and preoccupations?

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**Reaction:** How does anxiety typically show up in you? (thought patterns, feelings, behaviors, inner obsession)

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**Motive:** What erases God from your universe, hijacking the controls of your heart? Get as specific as possible. Our lusts and lies are evasive and deceitful, but to identify them is like publishing a picture of your enemy.

I want \_\_\_\_\_.

I fear (don't want) \_\_\_\_\_.

I believe \_\_\_\_\_.

If only \_\_\_\_\_, then everything would be fine.

**Message:** What *specific* “consolations” bid to delight you and reclaim you? Start to branch out from Psalm 94:19, working backwards and forwards into the surrounding sentences. What brought *this* worried man delight? You might also consider Psalm 103, Numbers 6:24-26, or Exodus 34:5-10 to prime your pump.

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**Turn:** Bring the real you, in your real world, to your real Savior. Weave together situation, reaction, motive, and message. Pick one specific “consolation” to focus on. Have an honest conversation with your Father about what matters – out loud, not just spinning words within the anxious chambers of your mind! Honor Him. Give Him thanks. Need Him. Ask. Plead. Confess. Delight. Notice. Remember.

**Respond:** What are you now called to do (and to not do)? What specific actions will express how faith-working-through-love replaces idolatry-working-through-worry? What exactly can and should you do right now? Later today? Tomorrow?

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3. Worship is the opposite of anxiety. What “consolations to delight your soul” do the hymns, (“Jesus, what a friend of sinners” & “How firm a foundation”) offer, give, proclaim, embrace, hope in, delight in?

## Anger

1. Ponder the following passage from Ephesians.

“Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear. Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.” (Ephesians 4:29-5:2)

Read it over 3-4 times. Take it slowly. Emphasize different sentences, phrases, words. Where do you tend to misfire in this area? Notice how God boxes us in: you can't “keep to yourself” (bitterness), or “go to the other person” (wrath and anger), or “go to other people” (clamor and slander)! We are driven to deal with our attitudes before God, and then deal constructively and mercifully with others. Notice how persistently Paul puts specifics about the Lord into the picture. He knows we need strong and sweet-tasting medicine in order to deal with anger. What most strikes you about this passage?

2. Now work through our six questions.

**Situation:** What circumstances trigger your anger or complaining? What pushes your buttons? \_\_\_\_\_

**Reaction:** How do you express anger? (thoughts, emotions, actions) \_\_\_\_\_

**Motive:** What are your “buttons”? I want \_\_\_\_\_. I must have \_\_\_\_\_. At all costs, I don't want \_\_\_\_\_ and must avoid it.

**Message:** What specific things does God reveal about Himself (right in this passage), that bid to do battle with your angry reactions? \_\_\_\_\_  
You might also start to fan out into the surrounding sentences in Ephesians.

**Turn:** Bring the real you in your real world to this Savior and Father. Have a conversation about what matters. *Talk* to God about these things. It is a huge step to verbalize out loud that our “buttons” (idols, cravings) are core sins, and to verbalize that we *need* the very mercies that are held out as our example. Christ is not a “model” that we watch from afar and then seek to emulate. Rather, he actually treats us with mercy, so we *experience* his mercy. By doing mercy to us, he teaches us up close and personal to show mercy to others.

**Respond:** What are you now called to do (and to not do)? What specific actions express how faith-working-through-love replaces craving-working-through-anger? What can and must you do right now that is merciful? Or when you get back home later today?

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3. Worship is the opposite of anger & grumbling. What “consolations to delight your soul” do the hymns, (“Jesus, what a friend for sinners” & “How firm a foundation”) offer, give, proclaim, embrace, hope in, delight in?

## Escapism

1. Ponder the following passages from Psalm 31.

“In you, O LORD, I have taken refuge...Into your hand I commit my spirit...You have seen my affliction; you have known the troubles of my soul...Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am in distress. My eye is wasted away from grief...Make your face to shine upon your servant; save me in your lovingkindness. How great is your goodness, which you have stored up for those who fear you, which you have wrought for those who take refuge in you, before the sons of men! You hide them in the secret place of your presence from the conspiracies of man; you keep them secretly in a shelter from the strife of tongues...Be strong and let your heart take courage, All you who hope in the LORD.”

Read it over 3-4 times. Take it slowly. Emphasize different sentences, phrases, words. Notice the troubles he faces, and how open he is about his experience. Jesus quoted this psalm as he was dying. Notice also how persistently he calls on the character and promises of God. What most strikes you about this passage as you think about it in comparison to the “false refuges” where you tend to turn when the heat is on?

2. Now work through our six questions.

**Situation:** What difficult circumstances trigger your avoidance and escapism?

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**Reaction:** How do you tend to express pleasure-, safety- and comfort-seeking? (thoughts and fantasies, ‘addictions, ‘vices’, emotions, behavioral choices to avoid or procrastinate)

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**Motive:** What “false refuges” do you flee to? What things, activities, and feelings do you turn into your god, your strong tower of safety, your comforter from trouble?

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**Message:** What specific things does God reveal about Himself (right in this passage), that bid to do battle with your escapism? \_\_\_\_\_. Fan out into the surrounding sentences, backwards and forwards into the psalm.

**Turn:** Bring the real you, in your real world, to this real Savior and Father. Have a real conversation about what matters. *Talk* to God about all these things. Look how honest David (and Jesus) are in this psalm. They honestly experience the difficult circumstances, and come to God about these experiences, interacting with specific things about God.

**Respond:** What are you now called to do (and to not do)? What specific action will express how faith-working-through-love replaces false-refuge-working-through escapism? What are innocent pleasures? What can and should you do right now? Or when you get back home later today? Or tomorrow when you face your typical difficulties? \_\_\_\_\_

3. Worship is the opposite of being an escaper and false refugee. What “consolations to delight your soul” do the hymns, (“Jesus what a friend for sinners” & “How firm a foundation”) offer, give, proclaim, embrace, hope in, delight in?

1. What is your situation? What are you facing?
2. How do you react? How are you typically tempted to react?
3. What rules you, capturing your heart? What do you want? Fear? Believe?
4. What does God in Christ say and do that enters, addresses, and changes everything?
5. Respond to God from the heart. Listen. Turn. Trust. Come. Seek. Ask. Talk. Transact.
6. Respond constructively into your situation. Speak. Act. Don't do.

## For further study in the future:

### Anxiety:

- 1 Peter 5:7 offers a particularly condensed version of themes we have been discussing: “Cast all your cares on Him because He cares for you.” A specific promise from God meets us in the variety of our cares. As you *really* hear this promise and call, anxiety must yield to faith. The parable of the sower has a pointed challenge to the corrosive power of anxiety (Matt. 13:22, Mark 4:19, Luke 8:14)
- “Peace, be Still: Learning Psalm 131 by Heart” (*Journal of Biblical Counseling*, 18:2, and in *Seeing with New Eyes*, P&R, 2003). This psalm is the finest example of how restless souls learn peacefulness!
- “Don’t Worry” (*Journal of Biblical Counseling*, 21:2, and in *Seeing with New Eyes*, P&R, 2003)

### Anger:

- Galatians 5:6, 5:13-6:10. Notice how the sins related to anger comprise 8 of the 15 works of the flesh that Paul samples in 5:19-21, as well as his introductory and concluding examples (5:15 and 5:25). Notice how it addresses both motives (lusts/cravings of the flesh as voices that contend with the voice and desires of the Holy Spirit) and lifestyle (works of the flesh, the behaviors and emotions that contend with the fruit of the Spirit). Notice how repeatedly, specifically and variously God reveals himself in order to produce faith working through love.
- 3 articles on anger by David Powlison (*Journal of Biblical Counseling*, 14:1, 14:2, 16:1)

### Escapism/addiction:

- Consider the dozens of psalms of refuge. Each calls us to the opposite of sinful escapism in the midst of the pressures of life. Psalm 55 is particularly vivid on the impulse to escape troubles, rightly directed.
- Galatians 5:13-6:10 (see above). Notice that the first three and last two works of the flesh are escapist sins. See also Romans 13:12-14. Here the first of four examples are in the escapist family of sins (and the last two are anger-family sins). Notice how horizontal sins are addressed in relation to heart issues (when desires of the flesh rule ----- deeds of the darkness; when faith puts on the Lord Jesus Christ --- daylight lifestyle)
- Ed Welch, *Addictions: A Banquet in the Grave* (P&R, 2001)

### Trials:

- “Suffering and Psalm 119” (*Journal of Biblical Counseling*, 22:4, and in *Speaking the Truth in Love*, 2005) God has much bigger goals than just solving our personal problems. He wants us to KNOW Him—and along the way that changes us, too. Psalm 119 is an example of the interpersonal/conversational nature of living, talking faith.