

Freedom from Depression and Anxiety Learning from a great trial from 1998-2001



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How our nervous system works

In this paper, nervous illness (NI) refers to depression, anxiety or nervous breakdown. Understanding how the nervous system works relieves much of the stress associated with nervous illness. Our nervous system consists of two main parts:

1. **The Voluntary Nerves** (autonomic) – These nerves help us move our bodies. They include the brain and spinal cord from which a number of paired nerves come, each ending in the muscle it supplies.
2. **The Involuntary Nerves**
 - a. **Sympathetic** (adrenalin-releasing) – These nerves stimulate adrenalin-releasing hormones that respond to moods such as fear, anger and embarrassment.
 - b. **Parasympathetic** – These nerves control internal functions, such as breathing. They keep the sympathetic nerves in check. However, if we have sustained stress or fear, the sympathetic nerves unhealthily dominate the parasympathetic nerves.

A nervous breakdown is an interruption in the body's efficient functioning as a result of emotional and/or mental fatigue brought on and maintained by stress or fear. A continuous state of stress or fear stimulates the sympathetic nerves producing a pattern of disturbing sensations. These sensations may cause additional fear, because they are unexpected, unusual and disturbing when first experienced. (Also, prolonged, negative worrisome thoughts may bring these same sensations.)

A nervous breakdown begins when the sufferer becomes *afraid* of the strange sensations that are produced by continuous stress and fear. They enter a circle of *fear* → *adrenalin* → *fear* → *more adrenalin* → *greater fear*. In other words, in response to growing fear about these strange physical sensations, more adrenalin is released, and organs are stimulated to produce even more intense sensations that inspire still more fear. Eventually, the sufferer becomes anxious and depressed.

The state in which our nerves react in this exaggerated way is called **sensitization**. Nervous illness is severe sensitization kept alive by stress and fear.

The Cure

1. Face

When you have the strange physical symptoms that result from sustained stress or fear, don't run from them. Go with them, relax, even analyze them. Understand that these symptoms are just strange physical feelings from over-sensitized, adrenalin-releasing nerves and that the feeling has no medical significance and causes no real harm. Look at the sensations with interest rather than fear.

2. Accept

Accept these unpleasant feelings as something that will be with you for a little while until you recover. Your nerves are sensitized and will take time to heal, just as a broken leg takes time. You will gradually forget to notice the feelings. By this acceptance, you break the fear-adrenalin-fear cycle that keeps your nerves in a sensitized state.

3. Float

Give up the struggle. Stop holding tensely onto yourself trying to control your fear or do something about it. Avoid self-analysis. Stop trying to navigate your way out of this illness by meeting each obstacle as if it were a challenge that must be met before recovery is possible. Bypass the struggle, go around the mountain, not over it. Loosen your attitude and relax your mind. Don't strive to relax, wait to relax. In your tense effort to control yourself, you release more adrenalin and so further excite your organs to produce the unpleasant sensations.

4. Let time pass

Be patient. Give yourself time to recover, and never be discouraged by failure. Rest, rest, rest.

3 things to remember each day (from what I learned along the way)

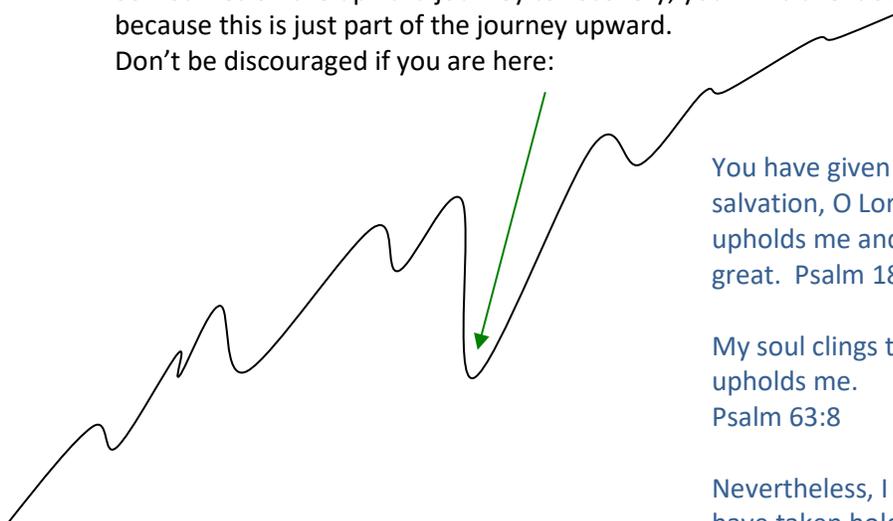
1. **Read the four instructions above every day.** Ask the Lord to give you the ability to embrace them until healing comes.

2. **Never be discouraged** by failure, or live in regrets, or say "if only."

3. There will be dips

Sometimes on the upward journey to recovery, you will travel downward. Don't be discouraged, because this is just part of the journey upward.

Don't be discouraged if you are here:



You have given me the shield of Your salvation, O Lord, and Your right hand upholds me and Your gentleness makes me great. Psalm 18:35

My soul clings to You; Your right hand upholds me. Psalm 63:8

Nevertheless, I am continually with You. You have taken hold of my right hand. Psalm 73:23

Other Very Helpful Information for Sufferers and Their Friends

- **Nervous illness (NI)** in this paper refers to anxiety, depression or nervous breakdown.
- **NI** is a body's physical expression of emotional or mental exhaustion from sustained stress or fear. As emotional/mental reserves rebuild, healing comes. No matter how deep the **NI**, it is temporary; recovery is always possible.
- To the sufferer's friends – the sufferer:
 - Needs lots of encouragement and comfort, not chastisement.
 - Needs an organized program so they can look ahead and know how each day will be filled.
 - Should not live alone while ill.
- To the sufferer:
 - Try not to be preoccupied with your problems; this deadens small joys.
 - It is difficult to make decisions when your nerves are healing. Let others help you. Don't be upset about your foggy mind. Give yourself time.
 - Morning is the time with the greatest sensations, so rise as soon as you wake!
 - Your recovery does not depend on your effort. You must rest.
 - Find someone you can talk to who will listen, give encouragement and good perspective. Your sensitized body will begin to find peace, and your tired mind finds rest.
 - Choose one wise friend. Talking to many people or counselors with varying opinions is wearying.
- Exposing the hidden cause for the **NI** may be interesting, but it is not helpful. Whatever the cause, your nerves must be rested to heal.
- Friends may say, "Why doesn't he get a grip and get on with his work?" That is what the sufferer would like to do, but he/she is truly unable to function normally (physically and mentally).
- When work becomes beyond our physical strength, and our responsibilities demand that we keep going, unconscious fear usually comes. Remember, the resulting **NI** is caused, not by the exhaustion, but by the fear it brings.
- In **NI** caused by emotional stress, there may be the repetition of the same familiar scene – a daily reminder of painful memories that impedes healing. Friends often advise the sufferer to stay on the scene, thinking that fleeing would be cowardly; however, a situation should be carefully considered before advising anyone to stay. A change of scene or vacation can be a restful relief, giving the sufferer a new perspective.
- Students experience **NI** after continuous study; they need to go outside and hose the garden until their mind clears. In the same way, the person with **NI** has been studying his problem for weeks or months and so the mind is gray, unresponsive, and exhausted. Days and nights of sleep are necessary to rest from ceaseless, anxious thinking.

My Story

Background

The factors that lead to nervous illness are as varied as the individual. This is only my story.

In April of 1980 at the age of 23, I came into a relationship with Jesus Christ. I knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that God had caused me to be born again and breathed His new life into my broken soul. He changed all my desires, freed me from addictions, and gave me an intense hunger for the Scripture. I loved/love Him. I read my Bible every chance I could get, not out of duty, but because it was so beautiful and life-giving and fed my hungry heart.

Manipulation

In the midst of this beauty, I unconsciously allowed the evil of manipulation into my world through certain relationships. My nervous illness was like a circuit breaker, protecting me from further harm and warning me that if something didn't change, I would suffocate underneath the weight of this control.

To manipulate means to control, manage, or play upon by scheming or by insidious, undercover means to one's own advantage. Often, people who control in these unhealthy ways are not aware that their behavior is harmful; however, others are intentional in their manipulation. Conscious or unconscious, manipulation binds the victim.

In his book *Between Two Worlds*, John Stott explains the difference between manipulating someone with ideas and actually helping or teaching them. He says, Christians must distinguish between true and false authority, that is, between the tyranny that crushes our humanity, and the rational, benevolent authority under which we find our authentic, human freedom.

In other words, under manipulation, we aren't freely making our own choices, but the choices of the manipulator. This destroys our own person and humanity. The insidiousness of manipulation can be difficult to detect; we often only recognize it after we are away from it. It is like sticky, trapping glue. If we discern manipulation, we should either confront the manipulator or run in the opposite direction.

Breakdown

In the 1990s, my physical body broke down. During the first few months, the illness was accompanied by various physical and mental conditions and thoughts, such as the inability to eat or sleep, intense humility and prayer for others, feelings of condemnation, hopelessness, a continuous torturous physical sensation, helplessness and eventually no more fight. I was completely recovered in three years. If I had earlier understood the four-step cure (Page 2) that is based on the truth of how God created our nervous system, I would have recovered sooner. Nevertheless, I have come to see and believe that God even had a purpose in allowing me to walk through those dark days.

Path to healing

Replacing truth with lies (Please see the chart on Page 6.)

My painful anxiety was kept alive by the fear of what was happening to me. Step by step, I relied on the Holy Spirit to focus on what was true physically, spiritually and emotionally. The thought that the enemy of our souls was causing the physical pain brought fear. When I understood the truth – that the pain came from overwrought nerves, the fear gradually disappeared.

Honesty and vulnerability

I openly shared my pain with others. I didn't know at the time how healthy and crucial this was. Even though I was embarrassed by the continual tears and debilitated by the horrible sensations, I forced

myself to go to a nearby church and sit at the back of a Sunday school. The people were warm and accepting.

Godly friends and listeners

Every weekend for at least a year, I went out to dinner with a friend who listened caringly, while I verbally reasoned the garbage out of myself. It was healthy for me to give voice on a regular basis to the inner struggle. The process was like the ocean waves that toss up refuse on the shore – a verbal purging of old patterns of thinking – a wrestling of my past thinking and the truth, and asking God to clarify the difference. Gradually, God cleansed my mind and emotions and brought rest.

Trusting God No Matter What

The trial deepened my awe and appreciation for God. Looking back on the pain, I can now see His love in a way that makes me know beyond a doubt that nothing comes my way that doesn't first come through His fingers of love. He used this trial to radically and beautifully change the course of my life!

Healing verses

- **1 John 4:18**

There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love.

- **Romans 8:31-35**

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?... But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

- **1 Peter 5:6-11**

Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings. After you have suffered for a little while [there is a beginning and an end to your suffering], the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, restore, strengthen and establish you. To Him be dominion forever and ever. Amen.

- **Haggai, 2:4,5,9**

"Take courage and work," [see Page 2] declares the Lord, "for I am with you. My Spirit is abiding in your midst; do not fear. I will fill this house with glory. The latter glory of this house will be greater than the former," says the Lord of hosts, "and in this place I shall give peace."

- **Psalms 18:19**

He brought me forth also into a broad place (a spacious place, a place of safety); He rescued me, because He delighted in me.

- **Hebrews 4:15-16**

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are, yet was without sin. Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Why did this happen? – Right and wrong ways to think about my suffering

Why had my life suddenly been catapulted into such tormenting suffering? As I cried out to God for answers, I began to make a list of possible causes. I learned that the cause didn't fall neatly into any one of these categories. The Psalmists moved from one cause to another in their search for answers in their pain and difficult situations.

This chart shows a list of my personal questions. The enemy's lies are in **orange**, and the truth of Scripture is in **green**. As I denounced the lies and received the truth, God freed me from harmful thoughts and brought healing and strength to my spirit, mind and body.

Was my suffering caused by...?	Wrong thinking (enemy's lies)	Right thinking (God's truth)
My sin? I opened the door to evil. I allowed people to control me.	lie - I am a horrible sinner. How can God forgive me? I must not be His if this is happening to me.	truth - I made wrong choices. Thank You, God, for taking care of my sin at the cross. I receive Your forgiveness.
Other's sin against me? I had been oppressed by a series of manipulative relationships.	lie - My present state is completely the fault of others. I wish they had never come into my path.	truth - By God's grace, I choose to forgive. If necessary, I am willing to confront the perpetrator in love.
The devil? The enemy used my weakness to accuse, pounce and devour.	lie - I must be very bad if this is happening. The devil must have taken over. I might even be possessed.	truth - I remember when You gave me new life! Nothing is more powerful than Your love. I belong to You! You will always heal me.
Heredity? I was told (after this crisis) that there were a few women in my family that had suffered in this way.	lie - Well then... what did anyone expect? There was no way I could have avoided this crisis. I was destined to suffer this way.	truth - Lord, You have the power to cut across lines of heredity. Thank You for giving me compassion for others who suffer in this way.
Environment? Incidents in my life were depressing and fearful. Did I learn this behavior?	lie - Well then... what did anyone expect? There was no way I could have avoided this crisis.	truth - Holy Spirit, I thank You for the redemption and healing you bring into all the broken places of our lives.
Personality? My response of depression to life situations was due to a melancholy, meditative, artist personality.	lie - I am just a little leaf in a powerful stream. I can only give in to what I cannot control. God made me this way.	truth - Thank You for giving me a sensitive personality that sees Your beauty and feels deeply. Take me into the freedom of self-forgetfulness.
Hormones? Many people told me I might be going through physical changes, since I was in my 40s.	lie - I am just a little leaf in a powerful stream. I can only succumb to what I cannot control. God made me this way.	truth - No hormonal problems were detected after blood tests, however, my body would no longer allow for the fear and oppression.
God's sovereign hand? – He knew what was necessary to form me more into the image of His Son and take me where He wanted me to go.	lie - What kind of God are You that You would allow this pain? Why are You cruel? I thought You were love.	truth - God, You see the big picture. Everything You allow is covered in Your love. I am thankful for the beauty you brought into my life as a result of this pain.