

HOW TO STOP DRIVING YOURSELF CRAZY WITH HELP FROM THE BIBLE

by Hank Robb, Ph.D

Diplomate in Counseling Psychology
American Board of Professional Psychology

FOREWORD

Some years ago, a psychologist named Dr. Albert Ellis began suggesting that most common human disturbances such as anger, anxiety, depression, guilt and procrastination were mainly caused by people's tendency to think nonsense instead of good sense.

Since it is well known that religiously oriented people typically turn first to their clergy and religious writings for help when experiencing these common human disturbances, it wasn't long before various people began putting together lists of Old and New Testament Scripture to buttress the notion that certain ideas are indeed nonsense and, as much as possible, had best be avoided.

This pamphlet contains an edited collection of these efforts drawn from the work of Paul Hauck, Ph.D., Albert Grau, S.J., Ph.D., Ricks Warren, Ph.D. and Howard Young, M.S.W. The Scriptural references have been drawn from a variety of translations. I also wish to thank Steve Kliewer, D. Min. and David Kratz, M. Div. for their assistance in this project.

Hank Robb, Ph.D.

BELIEFS MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE

Life gives you plenty of opportunities to drive yourself crazy, but you're the one who takes advantage of them. Just as you learn to decline other invitations, you can also learn to decline life's invitations to drive yourself crazy. You can even learn to decline gracefully! Perhaps you can't make lemonade every time life gives you lemons, but neither do you have to squeeze life's lemons in your eyes! You can learn to think more sensibly about your practical problems, thus reducing your emotional problems.

With some hard self-questioning, and lots of practice, you can discover the beliefs with which you give yourself emotional problems over your practical problems. Discovering your beliefs is the first step in learning how to stop driving yourself crazy.

There are three main ways to determine what beliefs are affecting your behavior. The first way is simple enough. You voice the belief out loud or think it to yourself. For example, you say out loud or think to yourself, "This is awful, I can't stand it!"

The second way occurs if you agree when someone else states a belief, even though you may not have previously said or thought it yourself. For example, someone says, "They can't even be humans if they act that way," and you respond with, "Right! They're not even humans!"

The third way to discover your beliefs is to determine if your behavior is consistent with a particular belief or set of beliefs. This way of knowing what you believe is a little more difficult than the first two. But it is very important.

Consider this thought experiment. Imagine you're in a room. Locate the door or doors. Now, suppose I ask you how to get out of this room. You point to the door, and say, "Through there."
I say, "Fine, let's go."

Instead of walking through the door, you attempt to go through the wall!

What do you really believe about getting out of that room? You said you believed one thing, but looking at your behavior shows something else. Your behavior shows you believe you can leave the room by walking through the wall!

If you want to know what beliefs are holding sway, look at your behavior. Ask yourself, “With what beliefs is my behavior consistent?” “What is my behavior showing that I believe?” This method also works as a check against the first two methods.

You may think your anger, anxiety, depression, guilt and procrastination are caused by your frustrations. You are mistaken. “Frustration” simply means you aren’t getting what you want, or you aren’t getting it as quickly and as easily as you want. To discover how your frustrations produce emotional problems, ask yourself what ideas you stick with when you’re frustrated. Are these ideas good sense or nonsense?

Like anything else, you learn to think more sensibly by diligently and persistently practicing sensible thinking over and over, until you get quite good at doing it. Of course, quite good doesn’t equal totally perfect! Perfection is for God; you’re a human.

When trying to overcome your nonsense, remember the three reasons you succeed at anything you find difficult. First, you use a strategy that has a chance of succeeding. Second, you don’t take your failures as proof you can’t succeed. Third, you don’t take the pain of failing as reason enough to stop trying. “I haven’t done it yet,” doesn’t necessarily equal, “I can’t do it.” And, “I can’t do it perfectly,” doesn’t necessarily equal, “I can’t improve.”

A STRATEGY THAT HAS A CHANCE OF SUCCEEDING

1. Recognize the times your behavior shows you’re sticking with nonsense. Also recognize you *can* stop sticking with nonsense, and reduce your emotional problems. You *can* change eventually, even if you can’t change *easily*.
2. Vigorously attack your nonsense, and attempt to stop acting in ways that are consistent with it. Attack your nonsense, but don’t attack yourself for having it. After all, humans *easily* think nonsensically.
3. Vigorously encourage yourself to believe more sensible ideas, and attempt to act in ways consistent with them.
4. Continue to act in the new ways despite the fact they feel uncomfortable and not “really me,” until they do become quite comfortable and second nature. Remember, people don’t feel comfortable and confident when they start any new behavior, for examples, riding a bicycle. Comfort and confidence come *after successful* practice, not before!

This diagram reminds you that it is your beliefs, and not events, which directly cause your behavior and emotions. Life gives you many opportunities for both the satisfaction and frustration of your desires. It is your beliefs about these opportunities for satisfaction and frustration which mainly cause you to feel and behave as you do. In turn, the things you do and the way you do them affect the kinds of opportunities for satisfaction and frustration which come your way.

If you want change, a good place to start is with your beliefs, because it is your beliefs that are mainly causing you to feel and behave as you do. You may never completely eliminate a tendency to stick with nonsense, but with diligent persistent effort, you can stick more strongly, more intensely, more forcefully and more frequently with good sense.

NONSENSE #1

I MUST HAVE LOVE AND APPROVAL FROM ALL THE IMPORTANT PEOPLE IN MY LIFE!

Everyone should like me and it’s *terrible* if they don’t.

THE BIBLE

“All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer

persecution.” (2nd Tim. 3:12)

“Marvel not my brethren if the world hate you.”
(1st John 3:13)

Jesus promises us the hatred and misunderstanding of the whole world. (John 15:18-25)

Misunderstood and disliked individuals from the Bible include: Jesus (Matt. 11:18-19), Moses (Num. 12:1),
David (Ps. 69:4), and Paul (2nd Cor. 11:24-27).

“What does it profit a man if he gain the whole world,
but ruin or lose himself?” (Luke 9:25)

GOOD SENSE

I enjoy approval from people. Therefore, I will act in such a manner that they will like me, as long as such actions do not violate my way of life. This will cause many people to like me, but not all of them. It's too bad that some people will not like some things I do. It is also too bad that some people will never like me at all. It's too bad — but I can still live a good and enjoyable life even without their approval.

NONSENSE #2

**I MUST PROVE VERY COMPETENT, ADEQUATE
AND ACHIEVING IN SOME IMPORTANT AREA OF LIFE IN ORDER TO BE WORTHWHILE!
If I do something important or good, my personhood
will be raised to the status of “important” or “good.”**

THE BIBLE

“God commended his love for us in that while we were
sinners, Christ died for us.” (Rom. 5:8).

“For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” (Rom. 3:23)

“But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the love with
which he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace
you have been saved).” (Eph. 2:4 -5)

GOOD SENSE

The fact is no human can be perfect. I will try to do *my* best, rather than *the* best, at whatever I decide God wants me to do. When I am dissatisfied with my work, my personality, or my behavior, I will refuse to put myself down. Instead, I will take positive steps to change my shortcomings. If I cannot change, I will learn to accept them as unfortunate, but not awful.

NONSENSE #3

**WHEN PEOPLE ACT OBNOXIOUSLY AND
UNFAIRLY, THEY BECOME BAD, WICKED,
ROTTEN INDIVIDUALS, AND
I AM RIGHT TO BLAME AND DAMN THEM.**

**You rotten worm! You're a super slob for
doing that to me, or will become a super slob**

if you ever do it in the future.

THE BIBLE

“Judge not, that ye be not judged.” (Matt. 7:1)

“Blessed are the merciful ...” (Matt. 5:7)

“Forgive them for they know not what they do.”
(Luke 23:34)

“... But I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them
that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray
for them which despitefully use you and persecute you.”
(Matt. 5:43-44)

“Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone ... I have not condemned you, go and sin no more.”
(John 8:1-11)

GOOD SENSE

Let's face it. Fish swim, birds fly, and people sin (do obnoxious, unfair things to each other). Humanity will forever have a tendency to act unfairly, and, unfortunately, people will often give in to it. But, bad actions do *not* knock people off the scale of humanity. When others are unfair to me, I will fight the instinct to blame and condemn them. Instead, and depending on the situation, I will learn to: (1) avoid them, (2) live *gracefully* with their unfairness, or (3) work with them for change.

NONSENSE #4

**IT IS AWFUL, HORRIBLE, TERRIBLE AND
UNBEARABLE TO BE SERIOUSLY FRUSTRATED, REJECTED, OR TREATED UNFAIRLY!**

This is terrible and I can't stand it!

THE BIBLE

“I have been thoroughly initiated into the human lot with
all its ups and downs, fullness, and hunger, plenty and want.
I have strength for anything through him who gives me power.” (Phil. 4:12-13).

“... do not fret over your life ... see how the lilies grow;
they do not toil, or spin, and yet I tell you that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.” (Matt. 6:25)

“Use every piece of God's Armor to resist the
enemy ... and when it is all over, you will still be
standing.” (Eph. 6:13)

“But man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly
upward.” (Job 5:7)

GOOD SENSE

Like everyone else, I dislike being frustrated, rejected, and treated unfairly, and I am wise to do everything possible to avoid or overcome such things. But the truth is that I will withstand anything I cannot avoid or change until I die or it stops. My only real choice is between withstanding it well or withstanding it poorly. Believing that anything is awful, horrible, terrible and

unbearable will only lead me to stand it poorly instead of well.

NONSENSE #5

HUMANS HAVE LITTLE ABILITY TO CONTROL THEIR FEELINGS GENERALLY AND THEIR DISTURBANCES IN PARTICULAR BECAUSE THESE THINGS ARE TOTALLY CAUSED BY EXTERNAL EVENTS.

They did it to me! I can't help feeling this way!

THE BIBLE

“For as he thinketh in his heart so is he” (Prov. 23:7)

“I thought on my ways and turned my feet.” (Ps. 119:59)

“... Be transformed by the renewing of your mind...” (Rom. 12:2)

“For I have learned to find resources in myself whatever my circumstances.” (Phil. 4:11)

GOOD SENSE

I can take charge of my feelings and behavior by changing my thinking. Perhaps I cannot change quickly and easily, or totally and forever, but with persistent diligent effort I can make *some* change. If I act on this knowledge, and take responsibility for what I am believing about the difficulties I face in my life, I can give myself less misery and more joy.

NONSENSE #6

IF SOMETHING IS OR MAY BE DANGEROUS OR FEARSOME, ONE SHOULD BE TERRIBLY CONCERNED ABOUT IT AND SHOULD KEEP DWELLING ON THE POSSIBILITIES OF ITS OCCURRING.

Oh my goodness, what if that happens!?! It would be awful!

THE BIBLE

“Fear thou not, for I am with thee. Be not afraid for I am thy God” (Isa. 41:10)

“I will fear no evil, for thou art with me.” (Ps. 23:4)

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything 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 minds in Christ Jesus.” (Phil. 4:6-7)

“... Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” (John 14:27)

“Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself.” (Matt. 6:34)

“So far you have faced no trial beyond what man can bear.
God keeps faith and will not allow you to be tested above your powers, but when the test comes he will at the same time
provide a way by enabling you to sustain it.” (1st Cor. 10:13)

“This is the day which the Lord hath made, we will rejoice and
be glad in it.” (Ps. 118:24)

“God hath not given us the spirit of fear, but of power and of love, and of sound mind.” (2nd Tim. 1:7)

“Be not afraid of sudden fear, neither of the desolation
of the wicked, when it cometh.” (Proverbs 3:25)

GOOD SENSE

Even though I may face harmful and dangerous situations, it is unhealthy and unnecessary to become anxious and painfully worried about the future. The more I worry, the more incapacitated I become, until so much tension is created that I next begin to worry more about the return of tension than the problem which first led to it. I thus become nervous over becoming nervous again; worry that I may worry; and become anxious that I will become anxious. These responses are hurtful not helpful. When I worry I “feel” that I am doing something positive about the problem when, in fact, I am not. No bad thing has ever been averted by worry. Besides, worry implies that God is not in control of the universe, or not interested in my life. If I believe there is a loving and powerful God taking a personal interest in me, I am wise to leave worry to God and do the best I can.

NONSENSE #7

**IT IS EASIER TO AVOID LIFE’S DIFFICULTIES
AND SELF-RESPONSIBILITIES
THAN TO FACE THEM.**

If I ignore it, maybe it will go away.

THE BIBLE

David *ran* to meet Goliath. (1st Sam. 17:48)

“We want you not to become lazy, but to imitate those
who, through faith and patience, are inheriting
the promises.” (Heb. 6:11-12)

“The soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath
nothing; but the soul of the diligent shall be
abundantly gratified.” (Prov. 13:4)

“Discipline, no doubt, is never pleasant, at the time it seems painful, but in the end it yields for those who have been trained
by it the peaceful harvest of an honest life.”

(Heb. 12:11)

GOOD SENSE

Self-discipline is no fun, and examining my problems can be painful. But if I avoid facing them and take the easy way out, I will have more pain and less gain in the long run. If I work on my problems, they will probably get better. If I ignore, avoid, or deny them, they will almost certainly get worse.

NONSENSE #8

**I MUST HAVE OTHER PEOPLE ON WHOM
I CAN ALWAYS DEPEND, AND I MUST HAVE
SOMEONE STRONGER THAN ME ON WHOM
I CAN RELY.**

I can't live life if I'm stuck counting on me.

THE BIBLE

“For I have learned to find resources in myself whatever
my circumstances.” (Phil. 4:11)

“When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.”
(1st Cor. 13:11)

“Happy is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord his God.” (Psalms 146:5)

GOOD SENSE

It is desirable to have people to rely on when I need help, and there's nothing wrong with seeking help to carry life's burdens. Unfortunately, there is often no person around to help me except me. Tough, but true! Refusing to try and live self-reliantly is refusing to try and fulfill my God-given potential to do exactly that: live self-reliantly. Besides, when I believe in a personal God, I am never totally alone.

NONSENSE #9

**BECAUSE SOMETHING STRONGLY INFLUENCED MY PAST LIFE, IT HAS TO KEEP DETERMINING MY
FEELINGS AND BEHAVIOR TODAY.**

**It's not *my* fault — I was *raised* this way! My mother
(or whoever) started me believing this and
now I can't change.**

THE BIBLE

“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” (Phil. 4:13)

“Forgetting what is behind me and reaching out for what lies ahead, I press toward the goal to win the prize which is God's call to the life above in Christ Jesus.” (Phil. 3:13-14)

“When anyone is united in Christ, there is a new world, the older order has gone, and a new order has already begun.” (2nd Cor. 5:17)

“Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold, I am doing a new thing” (Isaiah 43:18-19)

GOOD SENSE

My past *was* important in forming my present character and behavior. But just because I have stuck with an idea for a long time, or practiced a habit for a long time does not mean I cannot begin the processes of changing these thoughts and habits. *Today is tomorrow's* past. If I work diligently and persistently today, and every day, at sticking with different ideas and

establishing different habits, I eventually will have a different past and I will become a different person.

NONSENSE #10

**WE SHOULD BECOME QUITE UPSET OVER
OTHER PEOPLE'S PROBLEMS AND
DISTURBANCES.**

**It's so awful, terrible and horrible that this has
happened to Sally or Sam, but at least my high level
of upset shows I am a deeply caring person rather
than an unfeeling slob.**

THE BIBLE

“... Let the dead bury their dead ...” (Luke 9:60)

“Martha, Martha, thou art anxious and troubled about many things, and yet only one thing is needful.” (Luke 10:41-42)

“... First take the log out of you[r] own eye, and then you
will see more clearly to take the speck out of your
brother's eye.” (Matt. 7:5)

GOOD SENSE

Getting upset doesn't prove I am a “good” person. It only proves I am an upset person. Instead of getting upset over other people's problems, I am wise to first ask myself if the situation warrants my concern. There are many people in the world with many problems, and it is often wise to let people work at solving their own problems just as I am wise to work at solving my own problems. If another person's problem does warrant my concern, I can work diligently and persistently to make the best of things now, and assist the person in avoiding harm and cultivating joy in the future. However, there is nothing I can do while I'm quite upset, that I can't do more effectively and efficiently while I'm not upset.

NONSENSE #11

**PEOPLE AND THINGS *MUST* TURN OUT PERFECTLY.
IT'S UNBEARABLE IF I DON'T FIND PERFECT
SOLUTIONS TO LIFE'S PROBLEMS, SO
I MUST SEEK THOSE SOLUTIONS FRANTICALLY.**

**Solutions to my problems *MUST* be *PERFECT* or
I can't stand it.**

THE BIBLE

“In this world ye shall have tribulation ...” (John 16:33)

“In your patience, you shall possess your souls.” (Luke 21:19)

“Which of you by being anxious about it can add to his stature
a single cubit?” (Matt. 6:27)

GOOD SENSE

Perfection is for God; I am a human. Many times I am stuck with really bad situations and no good solutions. The only real choice I have is between making the best of a truly bad situation, and making something less than the best of that situation. *Demanding* that I change a bad situation into a good one is claiming the power of God for myself. I am wise to work diligently, persistently and calmly to make the best of every situation, and to remember that what cannot be changed is best accepted, *gracefully*. I can also recall Reinhold Neibuhr's Serenity Prayer:

God grant me the serenity
To accept the things I cannot change;
Courage to change the things I can;
And wisdom to know the difference.

NOTES