

Understanding OCD

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God." Philippians 4:6

Having obsessive-compulsive thoughts and responding to them is more common than most people realize. Like any fear disorder, there are various degrees of severity. I have been able to counsel dozens of Christians who have struggled with different symptoms and behaviors of OCD. Here are a few things I have learned over the years from an educational and Biblical discipleship counseling perspective.

What is OCD?

- Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) is a fear disorder characterized by perfectionism, obsessions, and compulsions. It presents itself in repetitive and often persistent ideas or thoughts. Common issues with OCD include fear of contamination, harm, illness, and various other worries.
- OCD often develops between late childhood and early adolescence to cope with ongoing stress from parental, family, school, or social issues.
- They can have an unwavering focus and inflexibility in the "right way" to do something to the point it negatively impacts their relationships.
- OCD tendencies can seem senseless, absurd, intrusive, bothersome, and embarrassing.
- If the thought or idea is not acted upon, it can create intense anxiety or a panic attack.
- These obsessions and compulsions are distressing, time-consuming, and can interfere with a person's daily routine, functioning, and relationships.
- Obsessions are capable of producing tremendous anxiety or feelings of discomfort, such as hopelessness, condemnation, and disgust toward themselves and others.
- Individuals with OCD perform these actions or rituals to relieve anxiety, avoid some dreaded event, or to prevent or undo real or perceived discomfort.
- Common compulsions include cleaning, contamination, checking, repeating, touching, hoarding, collecting, counting, organizing, and many other rituals.
- The person will often struggle with nagging questions like what if, and what about.

Help for Obsessive-Compulsive Tendencies

OCD can be more difficult with a chemical imbalance, and the person might need medication to help them. In the life of a Christian, obsessive-compulsive tendencies can make their life miserable and damage relationships around them. It becomes a weight they carry around. If they are willing to take responsibility and look to Christ, they can get better (Hebrews 12:1,2).

Spiritual Problems that Promote Obsessive-Compulsive Tendencies

First of all, there is a need to understand and address any spiritual problems that are a part of their struggle.

- Fear, worry, and regret.
- Confusion about what is reality and the truth.
- Pride and control.
- Perfectionism to the degree they can never feel "good enough."
- Negative thoughts about themselves and others.
- Judgemental and critical toward others.
- Fears of losing their salvation.

A Helpful Approach to Obsessive-Compulsive Tendencies

1. They need to understand what reality is (what is healthy normal) and accept how the magnified and distorted thoughts behind the OCD behavior is impacting their life.
2. With my clients, I address one thought pattern or action at a time. The goal is to help them look to Christ as they begin to treat their OCD. I want to help them build confidence with the small choices they make.
3. It is beneficial for them to understand how their OCD behavior negatively impacts their relationships.
4. They need to challenge and address the questions in their mind that increase fear and anxiety. The questions, What about ____? Or What if ____? These build on the thoughts, fears, perfectionism, confusion, perfectionism, etc.
5. The deception is this: "If you (obsessive thought or behavior) again, there will be peace." Any calm or peace is short in duration. The more the thought or behavior pattern is repeated and acted upon, the harder it is to control. As obsessive-compulsive tendencies control more of their life, they have less confidence, more anxiety, and uncertainty.
6. The process of change involves self-awareness and taking action at a critical point in the process. Learning to take every thought captive (2 Corinthians 10:5)) when triggered and the temptation, fear, confusion, or thought to do or think it "just one more time" comes, this is the point when you must say, "No," and look to Jesus Christ and focus on the truth and make a choice to move on (Philippians 4:7). It is essential to say "no" and move on at a critical point, but it can happen in most cases. It is one small victory at a time.
7. We have a sound mind because that is what the Scriptures say God has given you, 2 Timothy 2:7, "for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power, love, and self-control."

We are in a spiritual battle, and Satan has many ways to bring destruction in people's lives. Getting people involved in obsessive-compulsive problems is just one way. It has been a blessing to see people look to Christ and find help in their lives and find freedom!

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