

God's B.E.S.T.

Biblical Emotional Stewardship Tools

Tool #1: The Garden Test

Would things have happened this way in the perfect Garden of Eden
(before corruption entered the world)?

*"For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:
a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance"*
Ecclesiastes 3:1, 4

How can we determine if it is a *time to weep* or a *time to laugh*?

Circle what *would have* been present in God's original design for the perfect Garden.

Abandonment	Disability	Kindness	
Love	Idolatry	Pain	Patience
Divorce	Faithfulness	Manipulation	
Insults	Blame	Abuse	Gentleness
Self-Control	Deceit	Shame	
Slander	Lack	Death	Fear
Rejection	Peace	Loneliness	
Goodness	Danger	Joy	Injury

In its original state, the Garden was perfect as God is perfect (and Adam and Eve were perfect). So, we would expect to see characteristics consistent with God's character in that Garden. Hopefully, you recognized the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23) – and circled them!

Like a clown fish is designed for a saltwater environment, Eden is the *environment* our bodies and souls were designed for. But we have lost that perfect Garden environment in two ways:

❖ **Bad Present: Bad things that were not in the Garden are now present.**

Humanity was NOT designed to experience pain, abuse, and death. These are like poison in our "saltwater." Your soul will grieve when those bad things happen. Your soul will even react to things that get labeled as "small" (like a friend snapping at you) because bad didn't exist *at all* in Eden. Your *sensitive* soul is equipped by God to identify these imperfections ("poisons") that fall short of the glory of God in your environment.

❖ **Good Absent: Good things that were plentiful in the Garden are now lacking or missing.**

Like the clown fish needs good "salt" in its water, humanity WAS designed to experience love, joy, and peace. And when those good things are completely missing or lacking, your soul will grieve. It can be much harder to identify an absence of good than it is to notice the presence of evil. Our souls will usually identify something as "off" long before our brain catches on to what has gone wrong.

How do we know when our souls are grieving? The soul sends us emotions. Think through how the words you circled made you *feel*. How do you feel when you someone treats you with love or kindness? How do you feel when others keep their promises or practice self-control in their interactions with you? You feel *happy* – which I would categorize as a *pleasant* emotion. Now look back at the words you did NOT circle: slander, death, abandonment, danger, etc. How do those words make you feel? Not great, right? You may be experiencing some *pain* just thinking about the situations those words represent.

How will you know if your emotions are normal and/or healthy? Use the Garden Test!

- ❖ **Pleasant emotions** are a natural response to glimpses of that perfect garden.
- ❖ **Painful emotions** are a response to anything that became part of the human experience as a result of corruption.

Notice I used the terms *pleasant* and *painful*. Culturally we tend to label emotions “positive and negative” or “good and bad,” but our emotions are nothing more than our soul’s way of responding to the situations we experience. *Response* is also an important word. Think of your body’s response to touching a hot stove. It recoils automatically in pain! This automatic “built in” response is one way to understand emotions. Painful emotions are the soul’s automatic response to a painful, un-Garden-like event. The painful emotions signal that we have experienced imperfection. **Emotions are the language (i.e. communication) of the soul alerting us that either bad is present or good is missing.**

*Take note: The soul is not specific when it sends us emotions. It sends out a general communication that something is “wrong” (i.e. not perfect). It is your brain’s job to figure out what the soul’s signal was linked to. You could be having painful emotions because of a lack of sleep or vitamin D, because of a child’s disrespect, or because of a past wound that hasn’t healed properly. The most important thing is to keep investigating until you’ve figured it out! Emotions are not random. They are important signals to be heeded not ignored or shamed.

Our souls will remind us often that we are no longer in the perfect Garden – through the help of our painful emotional responses. Natural emotional responses continue to point to the heart of God and how we are made in His image (Genesis 1:27). A. W. Tozer said it this way: “Here is emotion on as high a plane as it can ever be seen, emotion flowing out of the heart of God Himself. Feeling, then, is not the degenerate son of unbelief that it is often painted by some of our Bible teachers. Our ability to feel is one of the marks of our divine origin. We need not be ashamed of either tears or laughter. The Christian stoic who has crushed his feelings is only two-thirds of a man; an important third part has been repudiated.”

Eden is gone. Painful emotions are everywhere. They aren’t fun, but they are normal. For now. But God has a plan to make all things new! In Revelation 21:4, God promises that the “garden” will be one day be restored and painful emotions will be gone for good! *“He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”* Praise God!

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Tool #2: Reconnecting the Brain language + emotion + truthful validation = brain healing

*"Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep."
Romans 12:15*

Did you know that your brain "breaks" when you are in distress? Here is how it works: The brain has two hemispheres which operate distinct systems. For example, the left hemisphere is our logic center and loves linear sequencing. The right hemisphere is more connected to our five senses and brings a creative flair. Each hemisphere has a unique perspective or "filter" it applies to understanding your environment. What you need to know for this discussion is that the left hemisphere contains your logic & language center, and the right hemisphere houses your emotional & sensory center.

Left Hemisphere	Right Hemisphere
<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Logical➤ Language Processing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Emotional➤ Sensory Processing

Connected Partnership

The brain's two hemispheres operate in a partnership. They share information. And incoming data is being sifted through the two distinct filters: the left logic & language center and the right emotional & sensory center. So when you make a decision, your left hemisphere provides analytical insights, and your right helps you collect data from your senses. Your left hemisphere hears the words someone is saying, and your right picks up on their emotion based on tone of voice and facial expressions. By sharing information and running data through both filters, the partnered hemispheres allow us to come to very thorough (and usually accurate) conclusions.

Disconnecting during Danger

Information-sharing between the hemispheres takes time. It's slow – just like the time it takes water to pass through two filters. When you're *not* in danger, slow is okay. But when your brain senses something physically or emotionally threatening in your environment, your brain knows it needs to speed things up a bit to get you out of the potentially harmful situation. It disconnects your hemispheres and powers down one of your filters for faster decision-making. You are now viewing the world through only one perspective – emotional or analytical.

You have little to no control over this disconnection and which filter gets powered down. It's like a hijacking. Instead of *you* (your partnered hemispheres/prefrontal cortex) driving the bus, it's now your disconnected brain (limbic system – fear center) which is in charge. The limbic system operates based on various protective modes like fight, flight, and freeze. The disconnected brain/limbic system has one goal: protect you! Surviving this *moment* (versus future ramifications) is the sole agenda of this self-protective disconnection.

Syncing Back Up

Now let's fast forward to when the threatening event is over: you've experienced some scary or painful things, and maybe you've done some scary and painful things. Your brain longs to get back to its connected-hemispheres state so that both filters can be applied again. You want to feel whole again. You want to feel like yourself instead of being a half-brained protective program. You need to use your hemispheres simultaneously to get them synced up again. You need to engage your left at the same time as your right, so that both are required to be powered on.

Regardless of which hemisphere temporarily powered down, you can use a simple formula to make sure that both hemispheres are activated: language + emotion = reconnection. Remember, the language center is housed in your left hemisphere, and your emotional center is located in the right. As you put language to the emotions you are experiencing because of the threatening event, your hemispheres are forced to re-engage with one another. You become whole-brained again. You leave your protective system and return to acting like your true self –viewing the world through a brain balanced by logic AND emotion.

Staying Reconnected

Once you've put language to your emotions, what is the glue that holds the reconnected brain together? Truthful validation. Being told that you are normal for feeling upset by the threatening events. Being told that it's good you are talking about it. Being told you aren't morally wrong for feeling your emotions. All of these statements are true! Truthful validation is the "safety glue" that holds together a brain that is finally reconnecting its two hemispheres. If you hear anything "dangerous" (i.e. nonvalidating or false) in response to your emotional language, the hemispheres will immediately begin to disconnect again. Not all truthful statements are validating. And not all validating statements might be truthful. But there will always be something that can be truthfully validated!

Connecting to Reconnect

A disconnected brain wants to feel connected internally between the hemispheres. Often the path to reconnection is connection with another person. We want someone who will be WITH US in our pain until we are ready to put language to our experience and as we start talking. We want to know that we are not alone. When someone connects with us in our sadness, it invites us to reconnect within ourselves (through brain reconnection). This is why God commands us in Romans 12:15 to "*weep with those who weep.*" God knows that our weeping disconnected brain needs to *partner* with someone who is comfortable with the weeping and will stay with us while our brain re-partners.

Partnering Language to Emotion with a Validating Partner

1. Prayer (emotional language to a validating *Heavenly Father*)
2. Lament Scripture (reading emotional language of *believers* which validates your emotions)
3. Venting (emotional language to a validating *person*)
4. Journaling (allowing the *Holy Spirit* to validate your emotional language)
5. Contemplation (thinking [in language] about how *Jesus* would validate your emotions)
6. Songs with similar emotion (the "*psalmist's*" emotional language validates your emotions)

The DO's and DON'Ts: "Weep with those who weep" Rom. 12:15

	Ineffective Strategies (DON'T)	Reconnection Strategies (DO)
1.	Underestimate the healing power of talking/crying "Whining about it won't solve anything."	Encourage that grief processing is healthy "Your brain is 'healing' even as you talk with me about how you are feeling."
2.	Dismiss pain "It's not that bad." "That's how life goes." "You'll be okay."	Validate pain "I can see this is really hard for you."
3.	Confuse grief with complaining/negativity "It's not biblical to focus on the 'bad.'"	Biblically grieve with the sharer "Hearing what you're going through saddens God and me."
4.	Cut grief short, redirect, or distract "Let's get your mind off of this."	Stay alongside a person in pain "I'm here in this with you so you're not alone."
5.	Make assumptions "I completely understand how you feel."	Ask questions that encourage sharing "How did that affect you?" "Did you feel ___?"
6.	Pressure for gratitude/positivity "You should focus on all you <i>do</i> have."	Call out imperfection "Bad was present and/or good was missing."
7.	Compare the situation (focus elsewhere) "It could be worse. At least ___ didn't happen."	Focus on the sharer's circumstances "Your situation is difficult."
8.	Provide solutions "Maybe you could try..."	Really listen "Talk as long as you need to."
9.	Insinuate the sharer is too sensitive "You are being a bit dramatic."	Recognize that vulnerability takes strength "You're being so brave talking about this."
10.	Command the sharer to have faith "You should trust God and lean on His promises."	Extend grace during dysregulation "You can describe how you're feeling even if it comes out a bit raw and intense right now."
11.	Feel guilty/take <u>false</u> ownership "I'm sorry. I should be doing more for you."	Celebrate the power of partnership "It is my privilege to help you heal by listening."
12.	Condemn the sharer for a <i>non-sinful</i> choice "None of this would have happened if you'd just ___ [e.g. been more careful]."	Help the sharer resist Satan's false-guilt attacks "You did not do anything wrong, but this world is wrong and broken right now."

	DON'T	DO
13.	Expect to comprehend the sharer's pain "I don't understand why you're this upset."	Endorse that grief has a legitimate reason "I've never been in your position, but I believe your feelings are a legitimate response for you."
14.	Try to fix the problem without being asked "I'll handle this for you."	Allow the sharer to take ownership "What do you feel God leading you to do?"
15.	Get defensive (if accused of causing pain) "None of this is my fault."	Listen objectively (if accused of causing pain) "It's okay that you're upset with me. I want to hear why you feel hurt."
16.	Place emotional responsibility on the sharer "Now I'm feeling depressed too."	Realistically assess any need for self-care "Thank you for sharing. I may need a few days to process all this."
17.	Accuse the sharer attention-seeking /selfishness "You make it about you all the time."	Demonstrate value through attentiveness "You and what you're going through matter."
18.	Break confidentiality [e.g. by inviting others to get involved without permission]	Protect the sharer's privacy "I will not share with others what you've shared with me."
19.	Require immediate level-headedness "You're being irrational."	Realize that emotions will calm "It's okay to be really upset right now."
20.	Joke about circumstances or emotions [e.g. attempting to lighten the mood through humor]	Stay in tune with the sharer's emotions/mood "Grief work isn't fun, but it's normal and necessary. I'm here to help you through it."
21.	Make it about listener's experiences "Your situation reminds me of the time I..."	Focus on the sharer's life story "Does this hard experience remind you of other difficult seasons in your past?"
22.	Defend the "enemy" "They didn't mean to hurt your feelings."	Take the sharer's side wherever possible "Treating you that way wasn't right!"
23.	Share perspective "The 'silver lining' to all this is..."	Save insights for later "What I think isn't nearly as important right now as what you need to say."
24.	Show discomfort with the sharer's emotion "Please don't cry."	Comfortable with tears "Crying is natural and healthy. Have a tissue."
25.	Imply that the sharer is a burden "You are an exhausting person to be around."	Value the worth of the sharer's soul "The time it takes to hear your burdens is totally worth it!"