

Deceived by OCD: When Crooked Paths Seem Straight

by Kimberly Monroe

Introduction

Proverbs 3:5-6

Trust in the LORD with all your heart
and lean not on your own understanding;
in all your ways submit to him,
and he will make your paths straight.

Those who suffer with OCD earnestly believe they need to protect themselves or others from a perceived threat, so their path—though crooked—*seems* straight. But they are deceived. They need to lean on God’s understanding of what they are facing, and in his mercy, he will help make their paths straight.

1. What is it like to experience OCD?

- OCD describes a person who experiences intense anxiety due to obsessive thoughts that are:
 - intrusive,
 - unwelcome, and
 - recurring.

The sufferer tries to relieve their anxiety by engaging in compulsions like checking, washing, and seeking reassurance.

Compulsions reduce anxiety briefly but ultimately they serve to further strengthen the obsessions. This creates a vicious cycle.

Why do some people struggle with OCD and others don't?

- My experience of OCD

- Allison Britz from her memoir *Obsessed: A Memoir of my Life with OCD*

- Aza from *Turtles All the Way Down* by John Green

2. What helped me... and why it might help you.

- OCD is anchored in deception. You take something that could be true, something that *is* possible (though *highly* improbable), and live and react as if it were true. It is a lie wrapped in a lie.
 - First lie: something terrible has or is going to happen
 - Second lie: if you just wash again, check again, or seek reassurance (or whatever compulsion you have settled upon) your anxiety will go away

- What helps?
 - Relabel your fear for what it is—a lie
 - Resist performing your compulsions
 - Give your fear over to God. Ask him to intervene and then trust him for whatever happens. And remember, he is with you—always. You are not alone.

- Over time, you will be able to exchange deception for truth and anxiety for trust. This breaks the OCD cycle.

- Driving example. Martin Luther & friends

- Why might this help you?

We have the same God—me, you, Martin Luther, John Bunyan, and St. Therese of Lisieux.

3. What are some counseling implications?

- Approach the counselee as:

- a saint

- a sufferer, and

- a sinner (preferably in this order).

- Mike Emlet writes: “[OCD] should be viewed as a weakness, *not* a chosen and intentional posture. Scripture does not treat anxiety as a high-handed sin but primarily as weakness and faintheartedness, and we should approach counselees accordingly (1 Thess 5:14).”¹

¹ Michael R. Emlet, “Scrupulosity: When Doubts Devour,” *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 33:3 (2019): 26.

- Addressing the heart
 - Your heart picks what you will obsess about. It is the breeding ground that generates your specific anxieties.
 - Repentance in these areas enables you to recognize and relabel your obsessions sooner and helps you to fight future lies before they form.
- OCD is complex and challenging but not hopeless.
 - As Christians we are especially blessed because God helps bear our burdens.
 - The Good Shepherd will rescue you and bring you back to the straight path as many times as you stray from it.

OCD RESOURCES

Counseling resources

- Books

Lee Baer, *The Imp of the Mind*, (New York: Penguin, 2002), 154 pages.

Ian Osborne, *Can Christianity Cure Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder?*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2008), 208 pages.

Jeffrey Schwartz, *Brain Lock: Free Yourself from Obsessive Compulsive Behavior*, (New York: Harper Perennial, 2016), 272 pages.

- Articles

Michael R. Emlet, “Scrupulosity: When Doubts Devour,” *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 33:3 (2019): 11-40.

Michael R. Emlet, “Loving Others as Saints, Sufferers, and Sinners (Part 1),” *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 32:1 (2018): 33-47. Part 2 was published in JBC 32:2, pages 40-65.

- CCEF website (www.ccef.org)

Use the search term OCD to access additional resources including podcasts and videos.

Memoirs

David Adam, *The Man Who Couldn't Stop—OCD and the True Story of a Life Lost in Thought*, (New York: Sarah Crichton Books, 2014), 324 pages

Allison Britz, *Obsessed: A Memoir of my Life with OCD*, (New York: Simon and Schuster 2017), 351 pages.

Sarah Clarkson, *this beautiful truth: How God's Goodness Breaks into Our Darkness*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2021), 212 pages.

<https://www.premierchristianity.com/real-life/im-a-christian-with-ocd-this-is-my-story/6129.article>

Other resources

- Novel

John Green, *Turtles All the Way Down*, (New York: Penguin Books, 2017), 288 pages.

- Film

Martin Scorsese, director. *The Aviator*. Miramax Films, 2004. 2 hrs. 49 min. This is a biopic about Howard Hughes, a famous aviator, filmmaker, businessman, and OCD sufferer.