

Biblical Solutions for Life Issues

Topic 45 – Obsessive Compulsive Disorder

Randy Thompson
Valley Bible Church
www.valleybible.net

Introduction

How about this... On your way to work at zero-dark-thirty, you no sooner get around the corner than you wonder if you closed the garage door. You are 99.9% sure you closed it, but the thought that you left it open nags you. You cannot seem to push it from your mind. It nags you so much that when you get to the next intersection, you make a U-turn and drive past your house only to confirm that you did indeed close the door. You then continue on to work with no more thought of the door.

Maybe most of us have experienced this. But what about after driving by once you question whether the door was really closed. Anxiety builds until you give in and turn around to check the door again and low and behold it is closed. As you continue on to work the cycle is repeated many times until you finally make it to work, but even then the doubt nags you all day long with building anxiety.

This is an example of obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) behavior. The term “OCD” has actually become cliché in the US to describe people who double/triple check things. But this does not even come close to describing the behavior. Today let’s look at what God has to say about OCD.

OCD Specifics

It is useful to describe behaviors that are identified with a label, but we must be careful about allowing ourselves or someone who behaves in this way to be influenced by a label. According to the DSM-IV, OCD is characterized by the following:

A. Presence of obsessions, compulsions, or both:

Obsessions are defined by (1) and (2):

1. Recurrent and persistent thoughts, urges, or images that are experienced at some time during the disturbance as intrusive and unwanted, and that in most individuals cause marked anxiety or distress.
2. The individual attempts to ignore or suppress such thoughts, urges, or images, or to neutralize them with some other thought or action (i.e. by performing a compulsion).

Common obsessions include: repeated thoughts about contamination (this is the most common obsession), repeated doubts, a need to have things in a particular order or a need to do a task a certain way, aggressive or horrific impulses (e.g. to hurt one's child or to shout an obscenity in church), sexual imagery (a recurrent pornographic image), an irrational and persistent fear of developing a serious life-threatening illness.

Compulsions are defined by (1) and (2):

1. Repetitive behaviors (e.g. hand washing, ordering, checking) or mental acts (e.g. mental check list, counting, repeating words silently) that the individual feels driven to perform in response to an obsession or according to rules that must be applied rigidly.
2. The behaviors or mental acts are aimed at preventing or reducing anxiety or distress, or preventing some dreaded event or situation; however, these behaviors or mental acts are not connected in a realistic way with what they are designed to neutralize or prevent, or are clearly excessive.

Common compulsions include: repetitive behaviors (checking, washing and cleaning, requesting or demanding assurances, ordering and arranging, doing and undoing certain tasks in an exact sequence), mental acts (counting, repeating words silently), hoarding (inability to discard things because I might need it or it has great value to me).

- B. The obsessions or compulsions are time-consuming (e.g. take more than 1 hour per day) or cause clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning.

Approximately 1-3% of the US population display OCD behaviors.

OCD can be caused by some medical problems, brain injuries, or current childhood strep throat. Also, research seems to show a genetic predisposition to obsessive behavior. Dr. Charles Hodges in his book “Good Mood Bad Mood” notes that how people think, feel, and act can shape their brain (see chapter 8). Psychological research looked at the brain scans of people diagnosed with OCD. The scans were different than a person without OCD. The same people were treated with talk therapy and the brain scans were again performed. After they had learned to change their thinking and behavior, their brain scans changed towards normal. This indicates in those cases that OCD does not have a pathology (a cellular reason for the disease).

It should also be noted that the behaviors associated with OCD are deeply ingrained.

Underlying Beliefs

There are things that people can believe intellectually. They understand them. They comprehend them. But there is another level of believing. This is at the heart level.

⁸But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart”—that is, the word of faith which we are preaching, ⁹that if you confess with your mouth Jesus *as* Lord, and **believe in your heart** that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; ¹⁰for **with the heart a person believes**, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. Rom 10:8-10

❖ **What biblical beliefs do you accept intellectually, but fail to believe in you heart?**

❖ **Conversely, what secular beliefs have you believed at the heart level?**

There are several heart-level beliefs of people choosing OCD behaviors. These need to be addressed to show the person that their heart-level beliefs are in contradiction to what God says. It is helpful to consider what each of these beliefs reveal about our view of self and God. A way to evaluate this in your own life is to fill in the blanks for this statement:

“If I believe this, then I think that I am _____ and God is _____.”

1. A person struggling with OCD might believe that it is solely up to him to control people or situations in order to keep himself or others safe and healthy.

Inflated responsibility – you have power to change or prevent negative outcomes.

“If I believe this, then I think that I am powerful and God is weak.”

We know this is not so since only God is sovereign. All things are under God’s rule and control; nothing happens without His direction or permission. Nothing takes Him by surprise. The purpose of His plan is His glory (Psa 19:1; Eph 1:4-6, 11-12; Rom 9:23; Rev 4:11). In working all things for His own glory, God causes all things to work together for the good of His children.

²“I know that You can do all things, And that **no purpose of Yours can be thwarted**.
Job 42:2

⁹“Remember the former things long past, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, ¹⁰**Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, 'My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure'**; ¹¹Calling a bird of prey from the east, The man of My purpose from a far country **Truly I have spoken; truly I will bring it to pass. I have planned it, surely I will do it.** Isa 46:9-11

²⁸And we know that **God causes all things to work together for good** to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose. Rom 8:28

❖ **In what ways do you place yourself above God in determining outcomes in your life?**

2. A person struggling with OCD might believe that every thought she has, even if untrue or irrational, needs to be dwelt on and considered. She might also be afraid to throw things away (such as empty food containers) because she thinks they might have information printed on them or will be needed in the future.

Over-importance of thoughts – the mere presence of a thought indicates it is important and must be controlled. If the thoughts are controlled, then you will make your own peace.

“If I believe this, then I think that I am important and God is not.

The thoughts that are truly important are God’s thoughts which are found in His word. The truth about our thoughts is that, apart from the filling of the Spirit and progressive sanctification from walking with God, they are evil.

⁵Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. Gen 6:5

⁹“The heart is more deceitful than all else And is desperately sick; Who can understand it? Jer 17:9

²⁰And He was saying, “That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man.

²¹For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, ²²deeds of coveting *and* wickedness, *as well as* deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride *and* foolishness. ²³All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man.” Mark 7:20-23

⁸“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,” declares the LORD.

⁹“For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways And My thoughts than your thoughts. Isa 55:8-9

¹²Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, ¹³which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual *thoughts* with spiritual *words*. 1 Cor 2:12-13

❖ **In what ways do you demonstrate that your thoughts are more important than God’s?**

3. A person struggling with OCD might believe that contact with germs or leaving a door unlocked or forgetting to put the cap on the toothpaste will cause serious trouble for himself or others. He might constantly doubt and recheck to see if he remembered to take care of these things properly.

Overestimation of threat – an exaggeration of the probability or severity of harm.

“If I believe this, then I think that God is unconcerned with me and unable to help.

This is ungodly fear and worry. Ungodly fears are unreasonable and irrational in light of our relationship with Christ and are not rooted in an abiding trust in God. Worry is ungodly concern which leaves God out. The focus is on what might happen, on difficulties, temporal matters, and self over others. God is not being trusted, thoughts are focused on changing the future and self and are unproductive. (See topic 44)

❖ **In what ways in your life to you display ungodly fear?**

4. A person struggling with OCD might believe that she can and should know the details of a situation with absolute certainty but may continually doubt her perceptions.

Intolerance of uncertainty – the necessity of being certain, along with difficulty functioning in ambiguous situations.

“If I believe this, then I only trust myself and God cannot be trusted.”

Only God knows what tomorrow will hold. We have limited knowledge and must accept that God can and will take care of the future.

¹Do not boast about tomorrow, For you do not know what a day may bring forth. Prov 27:1

¹³Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.” ¹⁴Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are *just* a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. James 4:13-14

¹³Consider the work of God, For who is able to straighten what He has bent? ¹⁴In the day of prosperity be happy, But in the day of adversity consider—God has made the one as well as the other so that man will not discover anything *that will be* after him. Eccles 7:13-14

²⁸And we know that **God causes all things to work together for good** to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose. Rom 8:28

❖ Who do you trust for the future?

5. A person struggling with OCD might believe that he can and should do all things without error and may repeatedly doubt that he has the correct solution even when he has checked it.

Perfectionism – the tendency to believe that there is one perfect solution to every problem and that it is possible and necessary to do everything mistake free.

“If I believe this, then I think that I can make myself righteous and God is unable to justify.”

We are not perfect and cannot be perfect (this is the point!).

²³for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, Rom 3:23

¹It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery. Gal 5:1

³¹So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, “If you continue in My word, *then* you are truly disciples of Mine; ³²and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” John 8:31-32

❖ Do you try to make yourself righteous?

Addressing OCD Biblically

General principles to address OCD.

1. Make a decision of the will that your highest purpose is to glorify God. Your desire to glorify God must be your greatest desire, your highest purpose, more important than anything.

To glorify God is to show His character in our motives, thoughts, words, and deeds. We purpose to make choices that honor God in obedience. We glorify God when we live in a way that those around us can see God’s character in us (Ex 33:17-23); when we display the life of Christ living through us (Gal 2:20).

³¹Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever **you do, do all to the glory of God.** 1 Cor 10:31

²⁰I have been crucified with Christ; and **it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me;** and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me. Gal 2:20

❖ **What is your most important and over-riding purpose?**

2. Strive to walk in the Spirit (“above the line”).

¹⁶But I say, **walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.** ... ²²But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, *peace*, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. Gal 5:16, 22-23

Living a consistently God-glorifying life is possible only through Spirit-filling. The Christian life is not lived in the believer’s own strength. It is a life lived filled with the Spirit as the life of Christ flows through us.

When a believer is submitted to God (Eph 5:18-6:9) and His Word (Col 3:16-4:1), the indwelling Holy Spirit fills (or controls) them and produces Christ-like character, heart motives, attitudes, words, and reactions. The believer in a right relationship with God will be filled with the Spirit. This is the usual, expected state of a believer.

As we bow before God in complete submission, we will be filled with the Spirit and exhibit the fruits of the Spirit. If we find ourselves sinning and therefore bowed before a master other than the Lord, then we must repent and bow again before the Lord. As we repent and once again bow before the Lord as master, we will be filled with the Spirit and the life of Christ will flow through us. We will have the power to live a God-glorifying life and exhibit the fruits of the Spirit.

❖ **Are you consistently walking in the Spirit?**

3. Be actively involved in a local body.

²³Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; ²⁴and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, ²⁵not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*; and all the more as you see the day drawing near. Heb 10:23-25

Believers are united in Christ and connected to one another. The body figure illustrates the diverse unity and interdependence that is present in the church. The body is made up of unique individuals who are united by the indwelling Holy Spirit. God has designed the church in such a way so that care can be brought to believers. The local body is the major way that God brings love, edification, encouragement, admonition, and comfort to believers.

❖ **Are you actively involved in your local body?**

4. Specifics of addressing OCD (some are similar to worry)
 - a. Cultivate a deep understanding of God’s attributes (see class topics 2 and 15).
 - b. Spend time having God talk to you through His Word.

¹⁹When my anxious thoughts multiply within me, Your consolations delight my soul.
Psa 94:19

- c. Recognize that God provides enabling grace.

⁷Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me—to keep me from exalting myself! ⁸Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me. ⁹And He has said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.” Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. ¹⁰Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong. 2 Cor 12:7-10

²Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; ³seeing that **His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness**, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. ⁴For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust. 2 Pet 1:2-4

- d. Recognize God owns everything, therefore the underlying beliefs of OCD can be thrown off.

¹The earth is the LORD’S, and all it contains, The world, and those who dwell in it. Psa 24:1

- e. Recognize that God cares for you and desires for you to entrust your cares to Him.

⁷casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you. 1 Pet 5:7

²²Cast your burden upon the Lord and He will sustain you; He will never allow the righteous to be shaken. Psa 55:22

- f. Recognize that Jesus is with you now.

¹⁸And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, ²⁰teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Matt 28:18-20

Walk through Philippians 4:4-9

⁴Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! ⁵Let your gentle *spirit* be known to all men. The Lord is near. ⁶Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. ⁸Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. ⁹The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you. Phil 4:4-9

1. Choose joy (v4)
2. Know that God is near and cares about you (v5)
3. Stop worrying and instead pray (with a submitted heart) with thanksgiving (v6)
4. Receive the promise of God's peace and let it guard your heart against sinful actions and thoughts (v7)
5. Put on right thinking committing your mind to dwell on “these things” (true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, good repute, any excellence, anything worthy of praise) (v8)
6. Moment by moment practice what God says (v9)

Example: I am worried that I will get sick from touching germy surfaces like money, door handles, meat, etc.

v4 – I will choose to rejoice in the situation that God has given me to practice His ways

v5 – I can trust and not fret because the creator of the whole universe is near and cares about me

v6 – Instead of choosing worry, I will pray for help and peace, again thanking God for this situation and His work through it

v7 – Even though I do not understand why I worry like this, I will choose to rest in God's peace and choose not to sin in my heart (thinking and actions)

v8 and Psa 24:1 – I will remember that the earth is the Lords and all it contains, the things and the people. I will focus on what is true. It is true that health and even sickness is in God's hands. It is true that people live healthfully every day and they touch these surfaces. It is true that contact with germs is really not in my control. Etc. ...

v9 – Each moment I have these thoughts, I will practice God's principles.

Concluding Thoughts

OCD, an extreme form of worry, is misplaced, ungodly concern about the things of life. Worry is a sin because God commands His children to not worry. When you worry you bow to another master and do not trust God and call Him a liar. In addition, OCD thoughts and behaviors place an importance on self-reliance. It leaves God out of your life and says that He is not strong enough or loving enough to deal with your daily life. God is not being trusted, thoughts are focused on untruth and false solutions. Through your relationship with Christ, the indwelling Holy Spirit, and the powerful Word of God, you can live a life based on truth exhibiting the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Real Life Scenarios

Yourself #1A: You have been asked by the school PTA to count money collected in a very important fundraiser. You fear touching the dirty, germy bills and coins but you are embarrassed to say anything. After touching the money, you feel sweaty and a bit nauseous over worrying about the sickness you will probably get from the germs on your hands. You wash your hands over and over at the school bathroom making sure to get soap under each fingernail. Once in the car you start thinking about all the germs you got on your hands from touching door knobs at the school on your way out. What can you do about these all-consuming thoughts?

Yourself #1B: You have counted the PTA money 5 times and have come up with the same total each time. You asked someone else on the committee to verify your count and he came up with the same amount. Yet, you feel that there might be a discrepancy so you feel like you should count it again. Even after you go home, you lay awake a long time at night recounting the money in your head and reviewing your tally sheet to try and see if you missed something. What can you do about the doubts and dread you feel?

Someone Else #1: Your young neighbor has confided that he is very nervous about getting his mail from the community box at the end of the street. He worries that he will drop his mail as he walks home. He retraces his steps, often more than once, after getting the mail to make sure that he didn't lose anything along the way. He has never found any dropped mail in doing this. In thinking about bringing Biblical care to your nervous friend, what is the first thing you need to know? What is the next thing you might share with him?

Someone Else #2: A lady at church has shared with you that she calls her adult daughter 6 times a day because she is worried that something might happen to her. She especially is concerned that she will be violently attacked or killed in a car accident. Even after calling her throughout the day, she lays awake at night wondering if her daughter is safe. In thinking about bringing Biblical care to this worried lady, what is the first thing you need to know? What is the next thing you might share with her?

Biblical Solutions for Life Issues

Topic 45 – Obsessive Compulsive Disorder – Additional Study

Read these verses that deal with God's Omniscience: Psalm 147:5; 139:1-6 ; Ezekiel 11:5; Acts 15:18; Romans 2:16; 11:33; 1 John 3:20; and Hebrews 4:13.

How does this attribute of God help you to know and trust Him?

How should this affect your thoughts about the difficulties of life?

How should you respond to God's omniscience? What would that look like in your daily life?

Read these verses that deal with God's Omnipotence: Jeremiah 32:17,27; Job 42:2; Amos 4:13; Romans 1:20; 11:36; Ephesians 1:11; Hebrews 1:3; Mark 14:36; Matthew 19:26; and Luke 1:37.

How does this attribute of God help you to know and trust Him?

How should this affect your thoughts about the difficulties of life?

How should you respond to God's omnipotence? What would that look like in your daily life?

Read these verses that deal with God's Sovereignty: 1 Chronicles 29:11-12; Psalm 115:3; Ecclesiastes 7:13-14; Job 42:2; Matthew 10:29; Romans 8:28, 38-39; 9:15; and Ephesians 1:11.

How does this attribute of God help you to know and trust Him?

How should this affect your thoughts about the difficulties of life?

How should you respond to God's sovereignty? What would that look like in your daily life?

Other attributes to consider: Transcendence: Isaiah 55:8-9; Isaiah 57:15; Psalm 113:5-6; Job 11:6-7; John 8:23; and Romans 11:33-36. Immanence: Jeremiah 23:23-24; Psalm 139:7-10; Acts 17:27-28; and Colossians 1:17. Love: Deuteronomy 7:7-8; John 3:16; 14:31; Romans 5:5,8; 8:35,39; and 1 John 4:8,16. Mercy: Psalm 6:4; Romans 9:23-24; Ephesians 2:4; Titus 3:5; Hebrews 4:16; and 1 Peter 1:3. Goodness: Exodus 34:6-7; Psalm 25:8; and James 1:17.