



How to Be a Whole Person in Christ

Introduction: Every human heart longs for wholeness and lasting joy. St. Augustine famously wrote, *“You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You.”* (Confessions 1.1) In other words, we remain fragmented and anxious until we find our true home in God. For Christians struggling to live a joyful life, the good news is that Jesus Christ offers **wholeness** in the deepest sense. The Bible teaches that if anyone is in Christ, they are a *“new creation”* (2 Corinthians 5:17) – the old brokenness is gone and a new life has begun. In fact, *“in Him you have been made complete”* (Colossians 2:10). One Christian counseling resource puts it this way: *“You’re not trying to be a whole person, in Christ you are”*, because in Him *“we have a whole, full, complete life. We are whole. There’s nothing missing.”*^[1] This wholeness is something Christ has accomplished for us, but it’s also something we grow into as we walk with Him.

Being a “whole person in Christ” means **every aspect** of who we are – spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical – is restored and unified under Christ’s lordship. Jesus said He came to give us *“life, and have it to the full”* (John 10:10), and that encompasses our entire being. In the sections that follow, we’ll explore what wholeness in Christ looks like and how to pursue it. We’ll draw on Scripture, psychology, and real-life examples to see how faith and practical wisdom work together. The goal is a **joyful, abundant life in Jesus**, where our relationship with Him brings healing to our minds and hearts, and where using God-given tools like counseling or medicine is not a denial of faith but an exercise of it.

Understanding Wholeness in Christ

To be “whole” in Christ begins with **identity**. When we put our faith in Jesus, we are united with Him – we become children of God (John 1:12) and receive a new identity. The Apostle Paul teaches that *“if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come”* (2 Corinthians 5:17). Our past wounds, sins, and failures no longer define us. In Christ, we are **forgiven**, *“God’s workmanship”* (Ephesians 2:10), and *“more than conquerors”* through Him (Romans 8:37). Crucially, Colossians 2:9–10 says, *“in Christ all the fullness of Deity lives in bodily form, and in Christ you have been brought to fullness.”* Because Jesus is fully God and fully whole, when we live in Him, we share in that fullness. One pastoral counseling text emphasizes that *“everything it takes to have a full life is in Christ and you and I live in Christ. So, in Him, we have a whole, full, complete life.”*^[1] In God’s eyes, we **are** whole in Christ – this is an accomplished fact of our salvation.

Yet many Christians don’t *feel* whole. We may intellectually assent to these truths but still feel broken, anxious, or divided inside. This is where the process of *sanctification* (growth in holiness and wholeness) comes in. Wholeness in Christ has to be **worked out** in our daily lives as we learn to live according to what God says about us rather than our old patterns. Jesus prayed for His followers to experience unity and fullness, asking the Father, *“Sanctify them by the truth; Your word is truth”* (John 17:17). Similarly, 1 Thessalonians 5:23 expresses God’s desire to *“sanctify you entirely; and may your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord.”* God cares about every part of us being restored. He wants to heal our spiritual relationship with Him, **and** our inner emotional life, **and** even our bodily well-being. This holistic vision is often captured in the Hebrew concept of *shalom*, meaning **peace, wholeness,**



and completeness. Jesus as the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6) came to bring shalom between us and God, and within our fractured selves.

It's important to note that wholeness in Christ does **not** mean we will have no struggles or suffering. In fact, the Christian life often involves trials that God uses to refine us (James 1:2-4). Even great saints experienced periods of anguish. For example, the 19th-century preacher Charles Spurgeon battled bouts of **severe depression** despite his deep faith. He wrote, *"I have suffered many times from severe sickness and frightful mental depression, seeking almost to despair... I find no better cure for that depression than to trust in the Lord with all my heart."*^[2] Spurgeon's honesty shows that being whole in Christ doesn't mean never feeling broken; rather, it means we bring our brokenness to Christ and find **strength and hope** in Him amid our weaknesses. As the Apostle Paul discovered, we can be *"sorrowful, yet always rejoicing"* (2 Corinthians 6:10) because God's grace is sufficient in our weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9).

In Christ, our **position** is secure – we are accepted and complete. The journey of the Christian life is learning to align our **condition** (our daily thoughts, emotions, habits) with that truth. This involves a holistic approach, engaging our spirit, mind, and body in the process of healing and growth. Jesus identified the greatest commandment as *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength"* (Mark 12:30). In other words, God desires an integrated person, wholly devoted to Him. Let's examine how each dimension of our humanity can be nurtured toward wholeness in Christ.

Integrating Mind, Body, and Spirit in the Pursuit of Wholeness

Modern science and Christian theology both affirm that human beings are **integrated wholes** – our physical, mental, social, and spiritual facets are deeply interconnected. Researchers in healthcare increasingly use a "biopsychosocial-spiritual model" of human well-being, recognizing that *"truly holistic health care must address the totality of the patient's relational existence,"* including spiritual needs, in order to treat people in their **fullest wholeness**^[3]. In fact, even the World Health Organization has acknowledged that health is not just physical wellness but a state of complete physical, mental, *social*, and (as was proposed) **spiritual** well-being [12]. For Christians, this simply echoes what Scripture has said all along: we are embodied souls – **whole persons**, not just bodies carrying around a soul. The Bible presents humans as unified beings with spiritual and physical aspects intricately woven. As one theologian explains, *"our humanity constitutes a psychosomatic unity. There is no divide between spirit/mind and matter"*^[4]. In other words, we can't neatly separate the "spiritual" from the "psychological" or "physical" parts of ourselves. A troubled mind can affect the body, a sick body can dampen the spirit, and a wounded spirit can cloud the mind. Therefore, becoming a whole person in Christ involves caring for **all** these dimensions under the guidance of God.

Let's break down the key dimensions of wholeness and how they relate:

- **Spiritual Health (Soul):** This is the core of wholeness – our relationship with God. Wholeness starts when we are **reconciled to God** through faith in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:18-19). Without this, we remain spiritually dead in sin. But once alive in Christ, we need ongoing **spiritual nourishment**. Regular prayer, Scripture meditation, and worship are not religious chores but lifelines for the soul. They connect us to the Source of life. Jesus said, *"Abide in Me... for apart from Me you can do nothing"* (John 15:5). Abiding in Christ through spiritual disciplines brings inner healing and transformation. For example, many have found that praying through their anxieties brings real peace: *"Do not be*

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anxious about anything, but in every situation by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God... will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

(Philippians 4:6-7). This is not just a platitude – **research confirms the calming power of prayer**. Neurological studies show that prayer and contemplation activate brain regions associated with self-reflection and soothing, quieting the stress response. In fact, praying has been observed to **activate the parasympathetic nervous system** – the part of our biology that induces calm and restoration – while deactivating the "fight or flight" response driven by the sympathetic nervous system^[^5]. In practical terms, turning to God in prayer can lower stress hormones like cortisol and help our brain shift out of panic mode into a state of peace^[^5]. **Spiritually**, prayer builds our trust in God; **physiologically**, it helps regulate our nervous system. What a beautiful example of how the spiritual and physical aspects of us work together when we seek God!

In addition to prayer, immersing ourselves in Scripture brings wholeness to our thinking. Jesus said, *"you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free"* (John 8:32). Often we remain fragmented because we believe lies about ourselves or God (e.g. "I'm worthless," "God doesn't care about me"). The Bible, however, renews our minds with *truth*. Romans 12:2 urges, *"Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."* Modern psychology agrees on the importance of replacing false, negative thought patterns with true, healthy ones – a principle at the heart of cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT). Remarkably, this aligns with Scripture's instruction to *"take every thought captive to obey Christ"* (2 Corinthians 10:5). When we meditate on God's promises (for example, *"Nothing can separate me from the love of God"* – Romans 8:39), we start to uproot the lies that cause despair and instead cultivate hope and stability. The **Holy Spirit** also works through Scripture to change us from the inside out, producing qualities like *"love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control"* (Galatians 5:22-23). Those "fruits" sound a lot like traits of a whole, healthy person!

- **Mental and Emotional Health (Mind/Psychology):** Christians are sometimes hesitant to focus on mental health, worrying it's a secular concept. But caring for our emotional well-being is a **biblical principle**. The Psalms, for instance, are filled with honest expressions of depression, anxiety, and anguish – teaching us to acknowledge and process these feelings in God's presence. *"Why, my soul, are you downcast? ... Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise Him"* (Psalm 42:11). A key step toward wholeness is not denying our emotions but bringing them into the light of Christ. This may involve **counseling** or wise mentorship, as Proverbs 11:14 says, *"in an abundance of counselors there is safety."* Sometimes a skilled Christian counselor can help us untangle deep-seated issues like trauma, grief, or chronic anxiety, using tools of psychology integrated with biblical truth.

Emotional wholeness also involves learning healthy coping skills. Secular research has identified many effective practices for improving mental health – and interestingly, many correlate with biblical wisdom. For example, **cultivating gratitude** is strongly associated with better mental health and resilience. Recent studies show that practicing gratitude regularly leads to *"greater emotional well-being, better sleep quality, lower depression risk,"* and even improved heart health^[^6]. The Bible urged this long ago: *"In everything give thanks"* (1 Thessalonians 5:18) and *"Do not be anxious... but present your requests to God with thanksgiving"* (Philippians 4:6). Gratitude shifts our focus from what's wrong to the blessings God has given, which in turn reduces stress and fosters joy. Another example: **connecting with others**. Psychology finds that social support and empathy are crucial for mental wellness, while isolation fuels distress. The Bible likewise encourages community: *"Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ"* (Galatians 6:2). Engaging in a church community, support group, or even just honest friendships where you can share struggles is vital. When we let others encourage us and speak truth to us in love, we combat the loneliness and shame that often accompany mental struggles.



It's worth noting that faith itself can be a powerful asset for mental health. Numerous studies have documented a positive link between **religious faith and mental well-being**. For instance, meta-analyses have found that on the whole, *higher religiousness is associated with better mental health and lower rates of depression* [40]. Part of this is due to the hope, meaning, and social support that faith provides. People who have a genuine relationship with God often experience a strong sense of purpose and hope even in hard times, which acts as a buffer against despair. Healthy spirituality also encourages positive coping – like trusting God, finding forgiveness, and serving others – which psychologists recognize as factors that improve emotional resilience [18]. On the flip side, certain *negative* religious experiences (such as feeling abandoned by God or punitive religious environments) can harm mental health [18]. So the key is nurturing a **biblically sound, loving faith**. A vibrant relationship with Jesus characterized by trust, grace, and hope will promote mental wellness, whereas distorted spiritual views (e.g. “God hates me” or extreme guilt without grace) need to be addressed for true wholeness. The takeaway: **Mind and spirit are intertwined**. By caring for our thought life and emotions through both spiritual practices and, when needed, psychological help, we move closer to the whole-person health God intends.

- **Physical Health (Body/Brain):** Our bodies and brains are part of God's creation and important to our wholeness. Sometimes Christians neglect the body, treating it as merely a “shell” for the soul, but the Bible calls our bodies “*temples of the Holy Spirit*” (1 Corinthians 6:19). Physical factors – like sleep, exercise, nutrition, and illness – significantly impact mood and even spiritual vitality. If you're sleep-deprived or malnourished, for example, it's harder to pray or think clearly. Caring for your physical health is not vanity; it's stewardship of God's gift and can directly aid your mental and spiritual well-being.

Modern medicine has revealed much about the **brain** and its role in our emotions. Conditions like depression, anxiety disorders, or PTSD have **biological components**: neurotransmitter imbalances, hormonal dysregulation, or neural pathways shaped by trauma. This doesn't make our problems purely chemical or remove personal responsibility, but it does mean we should approach them holistically. Sometimes the most *spiritual* thing you can do is get some rest or see a doctor. A poignant biblical example is the prophet **Elijah** (1 Kings 19). After a great spiritual victory, Elijah fell into deep despair and even wished for death. How did God respond? First, He sent an angel to give Elijah **food and let him sleep** – addressing Elijah's physical exhaustion – and only afterward did God engage Elijah in a gentle conversation to renew his perspective. This story illustrates that physical and spiritual restoration often go hand in hand.

Therefore, pursuing wholeness includes attending to *basic health habits*: getting regular sleep, eating a balanced diet, and staying physically active. Exercise, for instance, has been shown to reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety (some research suggests regular exercise can be as effective as medication for mild depression). Taking a Sabbath rest each week, as God commands (Exodus 20:9-10), is another way to physically and mentally reset, trusting God rather than overworking. Wholeness also means being **wise with medical care**. If you had diabetes, you would pray for healing *and* take your insulin as the doctor ordered. Similarly, if you struggle with a serious mental health condition, seeking professional treatment (therapy, or medication if needed) can be a critical part of God's provision for you. We will discuss this more in the next section, but it's worth emphasizing here: **using medicine or therapy is not a sign of weak faith**. It's an appropriate response to the physical realities of how our brains and bodies work. Our hope remains ultimately in God as the Healer, but God often works through human means. As Jesus said, “*It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick*” (Mark 2:17) – implicitly affirming the role of doctors. We honor



God when we take care of our bodily health, because it enables us to better love Him and others with our strength.

- **Social and Relational Health:** We are not whole in isolation. God designed us for **community**, and loving relationships are essential to well-being. Many struggles with anxiety or depression are exacerbated by loneliness. The church (the Body of Christ) is meant to be a source of healing community. Fellowship with other believers provides encouragement, accountability, and practical help. In community we also find our purpose in serving and loving others, which contributes to our sense of wholeness. As Romans 12:5 says, *"in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others."* Sometimes, healing comes through a brother or sister who listens to us, prays for us, or shares their own testimony of how God brought them through a valley. Don't underestimate the power of simply **being known and loved** by fellow human beings as part of God's process. Hebrews 10:24-25 urges believers not to forsake assembling together, *"but encouraging one another."* Such mutual support can significantly lighten mental burdens – even secular studies note that people with strong social support have better mental health outcomes and recover faster from illness. If you're seeking wholeness, actively engage in friendships, small groups, or a support group. Sometimes finding a specialized support group (for example, a Christian recovery group or a grief support group) can connect you with others who understand your struggle and share faith-based coping strategies.

In summary, **wholeness in Christ is holistic:** it involves a healthy soul (reconciled to God and spiritually nourished), a healthy mind (renewed and at peace), a healthy body (cared for and calm rather than chronically stressed), and healthy relationships (living in community and love). These facets reinforce each other. For instance, as you grow spiritually through prayer, you may experience mental peace which lowers your blood pressure and helps you sleep – improving physical health. Or as your physical energy improves from exercise, you might find it easier to engage at church and resist temptation, boosting spiritual and moral strength. God created us as complex beings with all these parts interdependent. The **goal** is not to idolize wellness for its own sake, but to be fully alive and equipped to love God and serve others. When one area is suffering, don't hesitate to address it with both **prayerful dependence** and **practical action**. The next section will delve deeper into how faith and modern treatments can work together in that effort.

Faith and Modern Medicine: A Balanced Approach

One of the most important (and sensitive) aspects of being a "whole person" is understanding the role of **modern medicine and therapy** in a life of faith. Some Christians fear that relying on doctors or counselors betrays a lack of trust in God. Others may err in the opposite direction, viewing medical or psychological treatment as a purely technical fix without addressing spiritual needs. A truly **balanced approach** sees legitimate medical interventions as part of God's providence, while keeping Christ at the center of our hope.

Biblical Perspective on Medicine: The Bible does not condemn using medical remedies. In fact, Luke (author of the Gospel and Acts) was a physician, and Paul advised Timothy to *"use a little wine for your stomach's sake"* (1 Timothy 5:23) – essentially a medicinal remedy for digestive trouble. Scripture praises God as the ultimate healer (Psalm 103:3), yet God often works through means. Just as we pray *"Give us this day our daily bread"* (Matthew 6:11) but still obtain bread through farming and baking, we can pray for healing and also seek treatment. James 1:17 reminds us *"every good gift"* is from God – we can include medical knowledge and skilled practitioners in those good gifts.



Over the centuries, many of the pioneers of hospitals and healthcare were Christians who saw caregiving as a ministry. They understood that alleviating physical suffering was an expression of Christ's love. Today, we continue that understanding by embracing helpful treatments for mental and physical ills as **"agents of God's mercy."** One Christian psychiatrist observed that antidepressant medications, for example, can be an *"agent of mercy"* to those in deep clinical depression, helping lift the darkness so that they can function and receive truth again^[7]. In theological terms, we live in a fallen world where disease and mental illness exist, but God in His mercy has provided means of relief. As one Christian ethicist writes, *"In this in-between age, God has provided medical technology as a mercy by which some degree of bodily health can be restored... God has extended His mercy to all mankind through the provision of health care."*^[4] The implication is that taking advantage of medical care, including for psychiatric conditions, is part of wise Christian stewardship of our bodies. We are **responsible to use God's mercies wisely**, which can include seeing a doctor or counselor, just as we utilize other gifts of God's grace.

When to Seek Professional Help: If you are struggling with persistent depression, crippling anxiety, addiction, or any mental health issue that interferes with daily life and spiritual growth, it is prudent and **not unspiritual** to seek professional evaluation. Often a family physician or a Christian counselor can assess whether a condition might benefit from therapy, medication, or both. Depression, for instance, can have a severe physiological impact: *"when the depression is more severe there are physiological changes in the brain which cloud one's thinking, cause physical symptoms, and can be extremely resistant to resolving"*^[8]. In such cases, a person might *want* to "just pray and feel better," but their brain chemistry is so imbalanced that they cannot simply reason or will themselves out of the despair. As a pastoral counseling center notes, **major depression** can be so dark that sufferers *"can't even make effective use of counseling, as their thinking is stuck in a 'sea of blackness' and they can't reason through what is true."*^[8] This is where antidepressant medication, for example, can play a crucial role: by treating the biological aspect of depression (e.g. improving serotonin levels, regulating mood circuits), medication can *"clear the fog"* enough for the person to then benefit from counseling, prayer, and Scripture. It's not an either/or – it's a **both/and** approach to healing.

Medication and Wisdom: From a Christian standpoint, deciding to use medication for mental health should be approached as a matter of **wisdom, not shame**. One Christian counselor explains that the choice to take an antidepressant or similar medication *"is rarely a matter of right or wrong. Instead, the question to ask is, 'What is best and wise?'"*^[9]. Wise decision-making means seeking God's guidance (pray about it), seeking counsel from trusted physicians or mentors, and considering the severity of the issue. We shouldn't automatically reach for a pill for every emotional struggle – spiritual growth, therapy, and lifestyle changes may suffice for many situations – but neither should we rule medication out categorically. **Faith and medicine can cooperate**. As that counselor notes, *"Wise people recognize that medication is a blessing when it helps, but recognize its limits. It can give sleep, energy, allow you to see in color again... but it won't answer spiritual doubts or solve heart issues."*^[9] This is an important balance: medication can address the **physical symptoms** (like improving sleep, concentration, appetite in depression), but it cannot fill the **spiritual void** or heal a bitter heart. That's why we use medicine *alongside* spiritual support, not in place of it. Our hope remains in Christ, not in a drug.

If you do pursue medication, continue to saturate yourself in prayer and Scripture, and stay connected to your church or a support person who can remind you of God's truth. For example, a Christian taking anti-anxiety medication might find that the medication steadies the physiological surges of panic, while concurrently a mentor or counselor helps them learn to trust God's promises more deeply to address the root fears. **Both together bring wholeness**. Jesus healed people both spiritually (forgiving sins) and



physically (curing diseases). In His ministry we see that holistic care is not contradictory. Therefore, a Christian with depression might take an antidepressant *and* meditate on the Psalms daily; a believer with ADHD might use medication *and* practice spiritual disciplines to cultivate focus and patience. There should be no guilt in using **all legitimate means** to become the whole person God created you to be.

Effectiveness of Integrating Faith and Therapy: Encouragingly, research shows that when therapy is tailored to include a person's faith, it can be very effective. In one clinical study at Duke University, researchers tested *Religiously-Integrated Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (RCBT)* versus standard CBT for patients with major depression. The results suggested that the faith-based approach was **just as effective** as secular therapy for reducing depression, and in highly religious patients it produced slightly better outcomes^[10]. In other words, integrating biblical principles (like forgiveness, hope, reliance on God) into proven therapy techniques can speed recovery without any loss of quality. Other meta-analyses have likewise found that *"faith-adapted CBT may outperform standard CBT in the treatment of depression"* for believers^[11]. This should give Christians confidence that engaging in counseling does not mean leaving your faith at the door – on the contrary, your faith can be a **central asset** in the healing process. A well-trained Christian counselor or an ethical secular therapist who respects your beliefs can help you apply both **Scripture and psychological tools** to your problems.

Real-World Example: To illustrate this integration, consider a composite case study of a struggling believer: "John" is a 45-year-old Christian man who has battled **severe anxiety** and panic attacks for years. He prays constantly for relief and feels guilty that he's still anxious. Finally, at the urging of his pastor, John visits a Christian psychiatrist who diagnoses him with an anxiety disorder. John begins taking a low-dose anti-anxiety medication to stabilize his overactive nervous system. Within a few weeks, he notices his chest isn't pounding all day and he's sleeping better. With his body calmer, John starts meeting with a Christian therapist weekly. In therapy, he discovers some underlying thought patterns – for example, he often believes *"If I don't control everything, everything will fall apart."* The therapist uses CBT techniques to challenge these distortions and brings in Scriptures about God's sovereignty and care (e.g. Matthew 6:34, 1 Peter 5:7 *"cast your anxieties on Him"*). John also learns breathing exercises and practices meditative prayer when he feels panic rising. Over three months, John's **progress is measurable**: his scores on an anxiety inventory drop from a crippling 18/21 down to 5/21 (from severe to mild). He reports going from barely leaving his house to volunteering at church and enjoying time with his family again. Most importantly, John's faith has deepened – he testifies that through this process he came to know God's peace in a way he never had before. *"I needed both prayer and practical help,"* he says. *"Using the medicine and counseling was not me doubting God – it was God providing for me. Now I can truly say the peace of God guards my heart and mind in Christ."* This example demonstrates how combining **medical, psychological, and spiritual** interventions can lead to a holistic restoration: body, mind, and spirit coming back into alignment.

In summary, **do not hesitate to seek help**. It is not "more holy" to refuse treatment and suffer needlessly. Yes, miracles can happen and God can heal instantly, but often He works through *process*. Utilizing therapy or medication under proper guidance is a form of **courage and humility** – courage to face the issue and humility to accept help. Always pray for God's direction in these decisions. And if you do use medical means, continue to treat Christ as the ultimate Physician of your soul. Medicine can set the broken bone, but God's hand ensures it heals correctly. Counseling can guide you to insight, but God's Spirit brings lasting heart change. Both are crucial in their place.



Practical Steps to Grow into Wholeness

Having looked at the principles, let's get very **practical**. What are some steps and habits that help cultivate a whole, Christ-centered life? Here are several best practices, drawn from Scripture, clinical wisdom, and experience, that you can begin to implement:

1. Daily Spiritual Connection: Consistency in *daily devotions* is foundational. Set aside time each day to pray and read the Bible, even if it's just 15 minutes to start. Think of it as taking spiritual "vitamins." This daily re-centering on God nourishes your soul and renews your mind. For example, many Christians start the morning with prayer and a chapter of Scripture to frame the day. Others find journaling their prayers or thanks to God very therapeutic. Choose a format that works for you. The key is to abide in Christ's presence regularly. Jesus often withdrew to pray (Luke 5:16), modeling the rhythm of engagement and solitude. Over time, these devotional habits anchor your identity in Christ (reminding you who you really are) and reduce anxiety by casting your cares on Him. Consider memorizing a few verses that speak to your struggles – for instance, if you battle negative self-image, memorize Ephesians 1:4-7 about being chosen and loved by God. Quote these truths to yourself when lies creep in. This spiritual discipline has a cognitive effect: you are literally rewiring your brain with truth each time you meditate on Scripture.

2. Practice Gratitude and Praise: Intentionally thank God for specific blessings each day. As mentioned earlier, gratitude is a "game changer" for mental outlook. Perhaps keep a gratitude journal or share daily thankfulness with your spouse or a friend. Even on hard days, find *one thing* to thank God for (sunshine, a kind word from someone, the promise of salvation – anything). The psalms demonstrate this pattern of honest lament turning into praise. Psalm 13 starts with "*How long, O Lord?*" but ends with "*I will sing to the Lord, for He has dealt bountifully with me.*" Cultivating gratitude and worship shifts your focus off your problems and onto God's goodness. It doesn't mean ignoring pain; rather it keeps the bigger picture in view. Physiologically, gratitude and joy release "feel-good" neurotransmitters like dopamine and endorphins. One Harvard study found that people who practiced gratitude had measurably lower depression and stress levels^[6]. The apostle Paul, even from prison, could write, "*Rejoice in the Lord always*" (Philippians 4:4) – showing that joy is rooted in **relationship with God**, not circumstances. Make it a habit to put on worship music and sing, or simply verbalize thanks in prayer. This is a powerful weapon against the darkness of despair.

3. Renew Your Mind with Wise Input: Guard what you allow into your mind. So much of our mental and spiritual state is influenced by our "diet" of thoughts. Limit consumption of media that fills you with fear, lust, or negativity. Instead, feed your mind with what builds you up. Philippians 4:8 instructs us to think on "*whatever is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, and praiseworthy.*" In practice, this might mean reading edifying books or articles, listening to uplifting podcasts, or simply **studying the Bible** more deeply. Consider joining a Bible study group for mutual learning. If you struggle with anxious or depressive thoughts, it can be helpful to work through a workbook or guided study on that topic – there are Christian resources that incorporate CBT techniques with Bible truth (for example, books on overcoming anxiety from a Christian perspective). The goal is not to ignore real problems but to **interpret** them through the lens of faith and truth. By consistently replacing lies (e.g. "I'm hopeless") with God's truth ("I have a hope and a future – Jeremiah 29:11"), you will gradually experience transformation. Romans 12:2 promises that renewing your mind leads to real transformation.



4. Take Care of Your Body: Commit to basic health routines as part of your spiritual discipline. This includes:

- **Sleep:** Aim for 7-8 hours of sleep if at all possible. Our brains do critical processing during sleep, and lack of sleep can exacerbate anxiety and depression dramatically. Sometimes, improving sleep hygiene (like reducing late-night screen time, having a bedtime routine) becomes a turning point for mood stability.
- **Exercise:** Engage in some form of physical activity a few times a week. This could be walking, jogging, cycling, playing a sport, or even doing active housework – anything that gets your body moving. Exercise releases endorphins and helps regulate brain chemistry; it's a proven mood booster and stress reducer. Many therapists "prescribe" exercise as part of treatment for mild depression or anxiety. If motivation is low, start small: a 10-minute walk while listening to worship music can lift your spirit and clear your mind.
- **Nutrition:** Eat regular, balanced meals to fuel your body and brain. Extreme diets or high sugar junk-food habits can affect energy and mood swings. Try to include fruits, vegetables, and protein. Drink water. Physical weakness or nutritional deficiencies (like low iron or vitamin D) can mimic depression symptoms, so it's wise to get medical check-ups as needed.
- **Relaxation:** Incorporate times of **rest** and relaxation into your week. God built the Sabbath principle for a reason – we are not machines. Chronic busyness and stress fray our nerves. Set boundaries to prevent overcommitment. Engage in restorative activities: perhaps a hobby you enjoy, time in nature, artistic expression, or simply taking a peaceful walk. Research on stress management shows that practices like deep breathing, stretching, or taking short breaks improve overall well-being^[^5]. Even a faithful servant of God needs to recharge – Jesus told His disciples to *"Come away by yourselves and rest a while"* (Mark 6:31) after intensive ministry. Allow yourself permission to rest; it honors God who cares for your whole person.

5. Build Supportive Relationships: Don't walk the journey to wholeness alone. Be intentional to connect with others: join a small group at church, meet regularly with an accountability partner or mentor, or see a counselor if needed. Authentic community is where we can share our burdens (Galatians 6:2) and receive encouragement. You might consider counseling groups or workshops at church (many churches offer programs like Celebrate Recovery, grief share groups, marriage enrichment courses, etc., which address specific areas of brokenness in a supportive, faith-based setting). Proverbs 17:17 says *"A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity."* Sometimes God's answer to our prayer for help is **sending a person** into our life. Be open to that. Likewise, serving others can paradoxically help heal us too – volunteering or helping someone else in need often brings a sense of purpose and connectedness that alleviates our own gloom. It reflects the principle *"it is more blessed to give than to receive"* (Acts 20:35). Of course, use wisdom and don't overextend yourself, but do stay engaged in relationships. If trust is hard due to past hurt, pray for courage and start with one person you feel is safe. As you experience acceptance and love from fellow Christians, it becomes easier to believe and internalize God's love – a critical part of becoming whole.

6. Embrace Forgiveness and Let Go of the Past: Unresolved guilt or bitterness can keep us in inner turmoil. Part of wholeness is allowing God to deal with the past. If you carry guilt, remember that *"there is no condemnation for those in Christ"* (Romans 8:1). Confess your sins to God and accept His forgiveness through Christ's sacrifice (1 John 1:9). Sometimes forgiving **yourself** is the hard part – but if God has forgiven you, you must not hold yourself in higher judgment than God. On the other side, if you harbor unforgiveness toward someone who hurt you, it will impede your healing. Jesus calls us to forgive others as we've been forgiven (Ephesians 4:32, Matthew 6:14-15). This doesn't mean excusing wrong or instantly

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removing all emotional pain, but it is a choice to surrender the debt to God and not let resentment poison you. Many people experience a breakthrough in emotional health when they finally forgive a parent, an abuser, or any grievance. Sometimes this might require help from a counselor or pastor to walk through the process (especially in cases of trauma). But it's worth it: forgiveness is a gift you give yourself – it frees *you* from the chains of the past. It makes room for God's peace to enter. If reconciliation with the other person is possible and appropriate, that can also be healing; if not, you can still reach a place of inner forgiveness before God.

7. Keep Eternal Hope in View: Lastly, maintain perspective that **ultimate wholeness awaits us in eternity**. No matter how much progress we make now, our joy and completeness will not be absolutely perfect in this life. We live in the “already and not yet” – Christ has redeemed us, but we still live in a fallen world with trials. Part of being whole in Christ now is learning to live with hope for the future. Romans 8:18-25 reminds us that creation and we ourselves groan for the day of full redemption, when our bodies will be made new and every tear wiped away. That hope can actually fuel our present journey. Studies in positive psychology find that having an **optimistic outlook** and sense of meaning greatly improves mental health outcomes. As Christians, our optimism is not wishful thinking – it's anchored in “*Christ in you, the hope of glory*” (Colossians 1:27). When you know that God is working all things for good (Romans 8:28) and that “*He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion*” (Philippians 1:6), you can persevere through setbacks without despair. Remind yourself often of the promises of heaven and restoration. This hope will give you resilience. As 2 Corinthians 4:16 says, “*Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day... for what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.*” Keep your eyes on that eternal prize.

By practicing these steps consistently, you create an environment in which wholeness can flourish. Change may be gradual – just as physical healing can take time, emotional and spiritual healing is often a journey of **growth**. Be patient with yourself as God is patient with you. Celebrate small victories (e.g. a week without a panic attack, or an improved mood rating, or simply feeling closer to God than before). When setbacks happen (and they will), don't condemn yourself; rather, view it as a signal to adjust or reach out for support, not a failure.

Conclusion: Living Whole and Joyful in Christ

Becoming a “whole person in Christ” is a beautiful, lifelong process of God's grace and our cooperation. It means **embracing Christ's completeness** given to us – knowing our identity as beloved children of God – and also actively pursuing healing and growth in every area of life by His power. We have seen that Scripture and science agree on many points: a healthy spiritual life, a renewing of the mind, caring for the body, and leaning on supportive relationships all contribute to our well-being. When integrated, these elements lead to a more abundant life, which Jesus *promised* to those who follow Him (John 10:10). Importantly, we have also seen that utilizing tools like counseling or medication when appropriate is not at odds with trusting God. In fact, it can be a **step of faith** – trusting that God can work through these means for our benefit, much as He works through the hands of a surgeon setting a broken bone.

Dear friend, if you are struggling to find joy or feel put-together, take heart that you are **not alone** and not a failure as a Christian. The journey to wholeness is one that even giants of faith walked. David cried out in the Psalms for God to restore his downcast soul. Hannah wept with bitterness of soul before she saw God's answer (1 Samuel 1). The Apostle Paul confessed he despaired “beyond his strength” at times (2 Corinthians 1:8). Yet in each case, God met them with comfort and deliverance. He will do the same for you. God's plan



for you is **shalom** – peace and wholeness through Jesus. *“The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit”* (Psalm 34:18). He is the Good Shepherd who *“restores my soul”* (Psalm 23:3).

As you yield yourself to Christ daily and apply the practical wisdom discussed, you can expect gradual transformation. Your anxious mind can learn the stillness of trust. Your wounded heart can be bound up and made secure in love. Your weary body can find strength and rest. And even if some thorn in the flesh remains, you will discover as Paul did that God’s grace is sufficient and His power is made perfect in weakness. In fact, many Christians find that their place of former brokenness becomes a source of ministry – with the comfort they received from God, they can comfort others (2 Corinthians 1:4). This is *wholeness*: not that we have no scars, but that our scars become storylines of grace and empathy.

Let us end with the encouraging assurance from Scripture: *“May the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; He will surely do it.”* (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24). **Wholeness is God’s work** – and He is faithful to complete it. Our part is to trust Him and take the next right step. As you do so, you can increasingly experience what it means to be a whole person in Christ, living in the joy of His presence and the fullness of His redemption.

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