

# IS SOMETHING HOLDING YOU BACK?

You know that feeling when something's just ... off? Maybe you're more irritable than usual, constantly worried, running on empty, or struggling to see anything good on the horizon. You might be telling yourself to push through, pray harder, or that it's not a big deal. But deep down, you know something needs to change.

This brief assessment will help you identify what's really going on beneath the surface. By answering a few honest questions about your patterns and reactions, you'll gain clarity on whether you could be dealing with anxiety, burnout, negativity, or anger—and more importantly, what to do about it. There are no wrong answers here. It's simply an opportunity to understand yourself better and take the first step toward feeling like yourself again.

It takes less than two minutes, and it could bring the clarity you've been looking for.

## START HERE

### 1. When you wake up in the morning, what's your first feeling?

- ☐ A: Tension or dread about the day ahead.
- ☐ B: Exhaustion, even after sleeping.
- ☐ C: Resignation or "here we go again."
- ☐ D: Frustration about having to face another day like this.

### 2. How do you respond to good news?

- ☐ A: I'm happy but immediately think "what's the catch?" or worry it won't last.
- ☐ B: I can barely enjoy it because I'm thinking about what's next.
- ☐ C: I have trouble believing it's real or that it applies to me.
- ☐ D: I wonder why it took so long or feel resentful it wasn't sooner.

### 3. When you're under pressure, what usually shows up first?

- ☐ A: A wave of worry or overthinking takes over.
- ☐ B: I push harder, take on more, and feel guilty slowing down.
- ☐ C: I assume things won't work out.
- ☐ D: I get irritated or frustrated quickly.

### 4. When someone disappoints you, what's your natural reaction?

- ☐ A: I wonder if I upset them or did something wrong.
- ☐ B: I pick up the slack without thinking, even if I'm stretched thin.
- ☐ C: I tell myself this is just how people are.
- ☐ D: I feel frustrated and might withdraw or snap.

### 5. How do you feel about asking for help?

- ☐ A: I worry I'm burdening people or that they'll think less of me.
- ☐ B: I feel like I should be able to handle it myself.
- ☐ C: I assume people won't actually follow through anyway.
- ☐ D: I'm frustrated that I'm in a position where I need help.

### 6. What goes through your mind during quiet moments alone?

- ☐ A: My thoughts race to potential problems or worst-case scenarios.
- ☐ B: I struggle to actually relax because I feel guilty when I'm not productive.
- ☐ C: I dwell on past disappointments or future worries.
- ☐ D: Small annoyances replay in my mind and build up.

### 7. How do you handle situations where you can't control the outcome?

- ☐ A: I try to plan for every possible scenario to feel prepared.
- ☐ B: I overwork to influence what I can, even when it's not my responsibility.
- ☐ C: I assume it will turn out badly, so I prepare for disappointment.
- ☐ D: I feel powerless and frustrated by the lack of control.



## UNDERSTANDING YOUR RESULTS

Great work! It might not have been easy, but you did it. Your honest answers have helped identify patterns that may be affecting your daily life, relationships, and overall well-being. What's important to understand is this: These struggles are not a reflection of weak faith or personal failure. They're signals that something in your mind, body, or circumstances needs attention and care. The insights below will help you understand what's really happening and, most importantly, what you can do about it.

### IF YOU ANSWERED MOSTLY “A,” YOUR RESULTS INDICATE: ANXIETY

You're not alone in this struggle, and you're not weak for feeling this way. Even people with deep faith wrestle with anxiety. In Scripture, we see David crying out in distress, Elijah paralyzed by fear, and Paul writing about being “hard pressed on every side.” The difference between worry and anxiety isn't about the strength of your faith—it's about what's happening in your brain and body.

#### What's Really Happening:

Anxiety isn't a spiritual failure; it's often your brain's alarm system working overtime. Your amygdala—the part of your brain that detects threats—can become hypersensitive, triggering your body's stress response even when there's no real danger. This creates a cycle: Worry triggers physical symptoms (racing heart, tightness in your chest), which your brain interprets as confirmation that something is wrong, which creates more worry.

You might be experiencing what's called “anticipatory anxiety”—your mind constantly scanning the horizon for what could go wrong. This isn't apathy or lack of gratitude; it's your brain trying to protect you by preparing for every possible negative outcome. But this hypervigilance is exhausting and keeps you from experiencing peace in the present moment.

#### The Path Forward:

Healing starts with understanding that anxiety often requires both spiritual practices and practical strategies. Prayer matters, but so does recognizing when your brain needs help regulating itself.

#### Immediate steps you can take:

- ▶ **Name it:** When anxiety rises, literally say out loud: “I'm feeling anxious right now.” This simple act of labeling engages your prefrontal cortex and can reduce the intensity of the emotion.
- ▶ **Ground yourself physically:** Anxiety lives in your thoughts about the future. Bring yourself back to the present through your five senses. What do you see, hear, smell, taste, and touch right now? This interrupts the worry spiral.
- ▶ **Challenge the narrative:** When you catch yourself thinking “What if something goes wrong?”, pause and ask: “What evidence do I actually have?” Often our anxious thoughts are assumptions, not facts.
- ▶ **Breathe with purpose:** Try box breathing: inhale for 4 counts, hold for 4, exhale for 4, hold for 4. This activates your parasympathetic nervous system, your body's natural calming mechanism.

#### A spiritual practice that can help:

Combine Scripture with these strategies. When David wrote, “Cast your cares on the Lord” (Psalm 55:22), he wasn't suggesting we suppress our feelings—he was modeling honest conversation with God about our fears. Pray specifically about what you're anxious about, then practice releasing it by physically opening your hands as a symbol of letting go.



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**When to seek additional help:**

If anxiety is interfering with your daily life—disrupting sleep, straining relationships, making it hard to work or enjoy activities you once loved—it's time to talk to a counselor or doctor. This isn't giving up on God; it's accepting the help He provides through trained professionals and, when appropriate, medication that helps your brain chemistry function as it should.

**Remember:** You can be anxious and faithful at the same time. Seeking help is not a lack of trust, it's wisdom.



## IF YOU ANSWERED MOSTLY “B,” YOUR RESULTS INDICATE: **BURNOUT**

Does it feel like you’ve been running on empty—pushing through, saying yes when you want to say no, carrying everyone’s expectations plus your own impossibly high standards? You might think it means you’re being responsible, committed, or faithful, but your body and soul are telling a different story.

### **What’s Really Happening:**

Burnout isn’t just being tired. It’s a state of chronic physical and emotional exhaustion caused by prolonged stress and overextension. Your responses reveal something crucial: You’ve likely been operating from a “should” mentality—“I should be able to handle this,” “I should do more,” “I should be stronger.” This isn’t noble; it’s depleting.

Here’s what’s actually occurring in your brain and body: Chronic stress floods your system with cortisol. Over time, this leads to what’s called “allostatic load,” when your body’s systems become overwhelmed trying to maintain balance. You may notice you’re getting sick more often, struggling to concentrate, feeling emotionally numb, or experiencing a sense of cynicism that wasn’t there before.

The guilt you feel about slowing down? That’s part of the problem, not the solution. You’ve likely equated your worth with your productivity, your value with your output. But you are not a machine. You are a human being who needs rest, boundaries, and permission to not carry everything.

### **The Path Forward:**

Recovery from burnout requires something that might feel impossible right now: stopping. Not slowing down. Stopping. This isn’t selfish; it’s necessary. Even God rested on the seventh day, not because He was tired, but to establish a pattern for us.

### **Immediate steps you can take:**

- ▶ **Identify your non-negotiables:** What absolutely must happen each day? Everything else goes on a “maybe later” list. You cannot function from depletion and expect to thrive.
- ▶ **Create boundaries with teeth:** Saying no is a complete sentence. Practice it. Start small: “I can’t take that on right now,” or “I need to check my capacity before committing.”
- ▶ **Schedule recovery like you schedule work:** Put rest on your calendar. Literally. Block time for activities that restore you—not productive hobbies, but true rest. Sleep. Nature. Silence. These aren’t luxuries; they’re requirements.
- ▶ **Examine your “shoulds”:** Every time you catch yourself saying “I should,” stop and ask: “Says who?” Often we’re carrying expectations that no one actually placed on us or expectations that aren’t realistic or healthy.

### **Spiritual reframing:**

Jesus regularly withdrew from crowds to rest and pray (Luke 5:16). He didn’t heal every person, attend every event, or say yes to every request. He modeled boundaries—not because He didn’t care, but because He understood human limitations.

You are not responsible for everything. You are not capable of everything. And that’s okay. In fact, it’s how you were designed.



### **The role of others:**

Burnout often requires help to overcome. Consider talking to a counselor about why you struggle to set boundaries and where your drive comes from. Often there are deeper beliefs about worth, control, or approval that need to be addressed.

Also, talk to your doctor. Burnout can have physical effects that need medical attention like thyroid issues, vitamin deficiencies, and sleep disorders. Don't spiritualize away symptoms that have medical solutions.

**Remember:** You cannot pour from an empty cup. And you honor no one—not God, not others, not yourself—by running yourself into the ground.



## IF YOU ANSWERED MOSTLY “C,” YOUR RESULTS INDICATE: **NEGATIVITY**

You may have realized that something has shifted in how you see the world. Maybe it happened gradually; disappointment after disappointment, letdown after letdown, until one day you realized you’re expecting things to go wrong. You’re bracing for the next bad thing. You’re protecting yourself by not hoping too much.

### **What’s Really Happening:**

This isn’t pessimism or a bad attitude. What you’re experiencing is a protective response to repeated pain. Your brain has learned a pattern: Hope leads to disappointment, so the safest strategy is to expect the worst. Psychologists call this “learned helplessness”—when past experiences teach us that our actions don’t change outcomes, so we stop trying or hoping.

There’s also a neurological component. When we repeatedly focus on negative thoughts, our brain creates and strengthens neural pathways that make negative thinking easier and automatic. It’s like wearing a groove in a path: The more you walk it, the more natural it becomes. You’re not choosing to be negative; your brain has been trained by experience to default to negative interpretations.

### **This pattern often shows up as:**

- ▶ **Catastrophizing:** automatically assuming the worst possible outcome
- ▶ **Filtering:** noticing only negative details while dismissing positive ones
- ▶ **Fortune-telling:** predicting failure before giving something a chance
- ▶ **Overgeneralizing:** one bad experience becomes “this is how things always go”

The exhaustion you feel isn’t just emotional, it’s cognitive. Your brain is working overtime to scan for threats, prepare for disappointment, and protect you from hope. That’s draining.

### **The Path Forward:**

Breaking free from negative thought patterns requires intentionality and patience with yourself. This didn’t develop overnight, and it won’t disappear overnight. But change is possible.

### **Immediate steps you can take:**

- ▶ **Notice and name your negative predictions:** When you catch yourself thinking “This won’t work out” or “Why would this be any different?”, pause. Write it down. The act of externalizing the thought helps you see it as a thought, not a fact.
- ▶ **Practice “realistic optimism”:** This isn’t toxic positivity or pretending everything is fine. It’s deliberately looking for evidence that contradicts your negative assumption. If you think “Nothing ever works out,” challenge it: “Has anything worked out? Even something small?”
- ▶ **Create a “good things” list:** Each day, write down three things that didn’t go wrong. This sounds simple, but it rewires your brain to notice what it’s been trained to ignore.
- ▶ **Interrupt the pattern physically:** When you catch yourself spiraling into negativity, do something that requires focus: count backward from 100 by sevens, describe everything you see in detail, recite a Bible verse you’ve memorized. This breaks the rumination cycle.



### **Spiritual practices that can help:**

The Bible is full of people who wrestled with despair and hopelessness. The Psalms in particular show us that bringing our darkness to God is not a lack of faith, it's honest faith. But notice the pattern in many Psalms: David starts with lament and moves toward remembering God's faithfulness.

Practice what's called "spiritual remembering." When negativity tells you "things never change," counter it with specific memories: "But remember when..." This isn't denial; it's balancing your perception with reality.

Proverbs 4:23 says "Guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it." Part of guarding your heart is being intentional about what you allow your mind to dwell on. Not denying reality, but not letting negative interpretation become your only lens.

### **When to seek additional help:**

If your negative thinking is accompanied by:

- ▶ Persistent feelings of hopelessness that won't lift
- ▶ Loss of interest in things you used to enjoy
- ▶ Thoughts that life isn't worth living
- ▶ Inability to see any positive possibilities

You may be dealing with depression, which often requires professional help. A counselor trained in cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) can help you identify and change thought patterns. And sometimes, medication is needed to help your brain chemistry function properly.

**Remember:** You are not your thoughts. And your past disappointments don't have to dictate your future expectations. Hope isn't naive ... it's brave.



## IF YOU ANSWERED MOSTLY “D,” YOUR RESULTS INDICATE: ANGER

That heat. That edge. That quiet simmer just beneath the surface. The irritation that seems to come out of nowhere over things that shouldn't matter this much. You might be wondering why everything feels so aggravating, why you're snapping at people you love, why you can't seem to calm down.

### What's Really Happening:

Anger isn't the problem, it's a signal. It's your body's alarm system telling you something needs attention. And often, what we experience as anger is actually something deeper: feeling unheard, disrespected, dismissed, or powerless. Anger becomes the bodyguard for more vulnerable emotions like hurt, fear, or grief.

Here's what's happening in your brain: When you perceive a threat to your dignity, autonomy, or values, your amygdala (threat detector) activates your body's fight response. Your heart rate increases, blood flows to your muscles, and stress hormones flood your system. This happens in milliseconds, before your rational brain can catch up. That's why anger can feel so sudden and overwhelming.

But there's more to your story. Your responses suggest you're not just experiencing occasional frustration, there's a pattern here. Perhaps you're feeling:

- ▶ **Chronically Dismissed:** Your needs, preferences, or perspective are regularly ignored
- ▶ **Lack of Control:** Things keep happening to you without your input
- ▶ **Accumulated Injustice:** Small slights have piled up without resolution
- ▶ **Exhaustion:** When we're depleted, our fuse gets shorter

The anger you're experiencing might also be what psychologists call “secondary emotion”: it shows up to protect you from feeling something more vulnerable. Under anger, there's often pain.

### The Path Forward:

Managing anger isn't about suppression or pretending everything is fine. It's about understanding what your anger is trying to tell you and finding healthy ways to address it.

### Immediate steps you can take:

- ▶ **Create space before responding:** When you feel anger rising, give yourself permission to pause. Say “I need a minute” and step away. This isn't avoidance; it's allowing your prefrontal cortex (rational brain) to catch up with your amygdala (reactive brain).
- ▶ **Name what's underneath: Ask yourself:** “What am I really feeling right now?” Often the answer is “disrespected,” “powerless,” “hurt,” or “scared.” Naming the deeper emotion reduces anger's intensity.
- ▶ **Get curious about the trigger:** When something sets you off, explore: “Why did this particular thing bother me so much?” Often our strongest reactions reveal our deepest values or unhealed wounds.
- ▶ **Release it physically:** Anger creates physical tension. Move your body: go for a walk, do pushups, clean something vigorously. This burns off the adrenaline and cortisol flooding your system.
- ▶ **Practice the “STOP” technique:**
  - Stop what you're doing
  - Take three deep breaths
  - Observe what you're feeling and thinking
  - Proceed with intention, not reaction

### Spiritual practices that can help:

The Bible doesn't condemn anger but warns us about what to do with it. Ephesians 4:26 says, “In your anger do not sin.” Jesus himself experienced righteous anger. The question isn't whether you feel angry, but what you do with that anger.





Proverbs 29:11 says, “Fools give full vent to their rage, but the wise bring calm in the end.” This isn’t about stuffing your feelings but about finding constructive ways to express and address them.

Practice praying when you’re angry. Not sanitized, polite prayers, but honest ones: “God, I’m furious right now. Help me understand what this is really about. Help me respond in a way that honors You and protects my relationships.”

### **When to seek additional help:**

If your anger is:

- ▶ Damaging your relationships
- ▶ Leading to verbal or physical aggression
- ▶ Causing problems at work
- ▶ Accompanied by thoughts of revenge or violence
- ▶ Happening more frequently and intensely
- ▶ Connected to past trauma

It’s time to talk to a counselor. Anger management isn’t about controlling your emotions, it’s about understanding their roots and learning healthy expression. Often, persistent anger is connected to deeper issues: childhood experiences, unresolved trauma, learned patterns from your family of origin, or even medical issues like hormone imbalances.

### **The role of boundaries:**

Sometimes anger is telling you that your boundaries have been violated and that you need to establish or reinforce them. It’s okay to say:

- ▶ “I need to be treated with respect.”
- ▶ “That behavior is not acceptable.”
- ▶ “I need space right now.”

Setting boundaries isn’t mean; it’s healthy. And it often reduces anger because you’re addressing the source of the problem.

Remember: Your anger is information, not identity. You are not a bad person for feeling angry. But you are responsible for what you do with that anger. And there is hope for healing and change.

## **WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?**

You’ve taken an important step today. Simply acknowledging what you’re dealing with requires courage—and it’s often the hardest part of the journey toward healing.

Download the first chapter of *Heal Your Hurting Mind* and start your journey toward healing. You’ll get immediate access to Craig’s personal story of burnout and recovery, plus the foundational understanding of how your brain works and why that matters for your faith.

**Go to [craiggroeschel.com](http://craiggroeschel.com) to download the chapter today.**

You don’t have to stay stuck. Healing is possible, and it can start here.

This assessment contains descriptions related to mental health. It is intended for informational purposes only and is not a substitute for professional advice, diagnosis, or treatment. If you are experiencing mental-health challenges, please seek the guidance of a qualified healthcare provider or contact a mental-health professional in your area.

All Scriptures quoted from NIV.