Overcoming Job Loss Blues

These are the notes from a presentation given by Lee Ann at Hope Presbyterian Church in Cordova, TN on March 9, 2010, for those struggling in a season of job loss and can be found on-line at: http://entertherest1.blogspot.com/2010/03/overcoming-resource-sheet.html. This document contains additional information provided by Lee Ann.

Disclaimer:
This does not constitute medical or psychological advice. Please consult your health care and behavioral health care providers if you are experiencing symptoms of depression.

Symptoms:

Some of the “Blues” Symptoms you may be experiencing and for which you should seek professional advice:

- Sleep disturbance – too much, too little or interrupted sleep
- Eating issues – no appetite or voracious appetite
- Low motivation, low energy, lack desire to do even things you once loved
- Lack of Focus
- Irritability, Agitation
- Sadness, Hopelessness
- Negative thought patterns – intrusive, repetitive thoughts, especially self-downing thoughts
- More susceptible to colds and viruses and infections
- Physical Pain & Discomfort

While situational depression is often temporary, it is still important to seek wise medical advice and council so that it doesn’t develop into a long term problem. These symptoms can also be brought on and/or exacerbated by medical issues, so please see your Physician to see if there are any contributing medical issues.

* Please make a wise, educated assessment of your lifestyle habits and make changes where you need to. Take your body and your lifestyle choices seriously. Many of our physical and emotional struggles can be alleviated by eating healthy foods in proper portions, doing regular aerobic and weight-bearing exercises and getting enough quality sleep.
Life Perspective: Good Stress & Bad Stress

Situational Depression often presents during difficult life circumstances and resolves when either the situational stress is alleviated, or when you find more effective coping skills. One of the most important coping skills you can develop is to strengthen and exercise your ability to adopt a healthy perspective about your situation, even when it is an ongoing undesirable circumstance.

Whether we experience stress as good or bad depends, to a large degree, upon what perspective we adopt with regard to our situation. You can probably think of times when you were under a lot of pressure, but it actually prompted you to perform very well. For instance, some people say they prefer a quickly approaching deadline in order to get themselves really motivated to dig in and do a good job. These people have adopted a motivating perspective about deadlines; they see them as challenges that they can rise to rather than burdens that overwhelm them.

**An Exercise:** Think of a time when you have intentionally adopted a motivating perspective in a difficult situation. Think deeply about what kinds of thoughts you adopted in that situation and how you felt. Use the memory of that difficult situation in which you successfully rose to meet the demands as a touchstone. When you find yourself overwhelmed, remember this time that you succeeded and remind yourself that you can succeed again. Get detailed in your recall: remind yourself of what kind of perspective you adopted, what kind of thoughts you thought, and what kinds of feelings you had as you rose to meet the challenge.

The ancient Israelites built stones of remembrance when God brought them through difficult times and taught them something about what they could endure and accomplish with Him as their God. Developing a practice of building your own memorial stones, whether tangibly or mentally, is important. Remember and call upon the times you have been successful, and even more, remember that you have a faithful God who has a plan for your life.

Some people write about these memorable times so that they can re-capture the experiences by reading about them when they need to. Some people create art pieces to remember those times. I have large stones that I write meaningful words upon. I place them in my home to remind me of times God has enabled me to do or endure something I didn’t think I could. I also journal. Too often we journal about the hard times and our struggles, but we fail to write about the times when we overcame. It’s important to spend time rehearsing successes and situations in which God helped us endure and grow.
Spiritual Perspective

Jeremiah 29:11-13 “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.”

Life is all about perspective, and perspective is, in many ways, another term for belief. Beliefs are thoughts we hold deeply and maintain with much conviction. We must examine our beliefs to see if they line up with truth because when they don’t, we experience stress in a way that is harmful and destructive to our minds, emotions, behaviors and bodies. When our beliefs are lined up with truth, we can experience stress in ways that help us persevere, get motivated and creative, and grow.

**An Exercise:** A vitally important question for you about your perspective: How do you see your situation? Do you truly believe God is sovereign over this time in your life? Do you believe He is using this as a wilderness time in which He desires you to learn how to lean upon Him and be more intimate with Him? Do you truly know that He desires this time to be a time of growth and transformation for you; a time in which you can learn more about and step more deeply into your unique purpose in this world?

We each have a unique story and a unique purpose in this world. We were each meant to bring our lives to bear upon this world in a special way; to communicate something about God’s loving character, His creative beauty and provision. We were each meant to grow glory and defeat evil in this world in unique ways. Do you see this time as a season in which God desires to get you to seek Him with all your heart so that He can usher you into a place where you live out your purpose more fully?

If that is not your perspective; if you think this season of job loss is just bad luck or even that you are just experiencing consequences of bad choices or a bad economy, it would be helpful to pray about adjusting your perspective. If you are God’s child, you are well loved, and He does not intend to bring you harm. Quite the opposite, He intends to bring you into maturity and glory, and for you to bring something of Him into this world through your life.

It is a foundational spiritual truth that we are pilgrims on a journey. Life is not supposed to remain static and comfortable for us. We are a people called to journey deeper and deeper into faith with God.

Every main character in scripture – our cloud of witnesses to this life – was called on a journey by God. And the journey was an adventure, full of twists and turns, unknowns, dangers, difficulties; but also full of amazing and wondrous surprises of God showing up to bless in ways they could never have imagined in their wildest dreams. We too are on that very same kind of journey.
If you are having trouble believing these truths, seek spiritual counsel. I also suggest Dan Allender's book, “To Be Told” and Graham Cooke’s CD set “The Missing Piece.”

The point is this: Our perspective about who our God is and what our lives are supposed to be like greatly and dramatically influences how we think about, feel about and respond to the circumstances that come our way.

If we trust that He is at work for our good, no matter what happens, we watch for His hand everywhere we go. We know we are not victims, but there is a purpose and plan being worked out in us and through us and around us. We learn to walk in faith and rest – even when our hearts break and we tremble in fear. We learn to trust and find peace in the midst of chaos. We celebrate the glimpses we get of God and of goodness here on this leg of our journey.

I recommend you listen to the free mp3 download by Graham Cooke listed on the following post, "Overcoming the Job Loss Blues Resource List." As you listen to this teacher, you will laugh and you will come away with a sense of hope – and you will want more of life, and believe it possible.

I also recommend you read John Eldredge’s book, “Walking with God” and visit his website www.walkingwithgod.net

“Walking with God” will help you detect where your beliefs are wandering from the truth, and will help you develop more intimacy in your relationship with God – so you learn to truly rely on Him for guidance and hear Him answer you. He promised that His sheep would hear His voice, and that He sent His Spirit to live in us, to counsel us, guide us and comfort us. If you’re not hearing God and receiving His guidance and comfort, get these resources and get serious about chasing after Him; seeking Him with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. It is your divine right as His child to hear Him and receive His counsel. Learn how to stop striving to figure it all out on your own and to listen to His leading instead. Learn how to trust and rest in knowing He is going to lead you and provide for you.

Honor this time as a season of transformation – a season when you have time to learn lessons about God and yourself.

An Exercise: How would this time of your life look if you truly believed this was, in part, a season for you to learn how fearfully and wonderfully made you are? How would your thoughts and feelings change if you believed this was a season in which God wanted you to explore more deeply who you are and what you love to do, and maybe even pursue something you dreamed of, but didn’t have the opportunity to do because you were tied down to a job? What is one small thing you might do differently if you believed this was a season
of growth and blessing in addition to one of loss and trial? What if your current losses and trials are seeds that have fallen to the ground that new life might bloom?

Mental & Emotional Perspective

Our thoughts affect our biochemistry, our emotions and our physical health. Our thoughts have incredibly powerful influences on our lives and, thankfully, we have a good bit of control over our thinking patterns. It is worth while to develop the habit of paying attention to your thinking patterns, and practice exchanging the unhealthy thought patterns with healthier ones.

Often times, self-downing thought patterns are present in people who are experiencing symptoms of depression. One of the most destructive type of thoughts involved in this pattern are perfectionist demands on oneself: both demands that one must be able to do things one isn’t currently doing, and/or demands that one must not be experiencing things one is, in fact, struggling with. Perfectionistic demands set us up for failure because they are unattainable, black and white, all or none demands.

These perfectionistic thinking patterns need to be hunted down and destroyed! Okay, maybe that’s a little extreme, but they do need to be rejected and replaced with truer, kinder thoughts. These perfectionistic thoughts are your mental Pharisees; they lack truth, grace and kindness. They are ruthless, angry task masters and they in no way motivate you towards your goals. They are your enemy, and they certainly come from your enemy, Satan. Learn to recognize them, shut them up and replace them with thoughts of truth and grace.

Some examples of self-downing thoughts:

- I can’t seem to get anything right these days.
- I just don’t have what it takes.
- I can’t take this any more.
- I should have already gotten a job by now and I haven’t. Everything is stacked against me.
- I should be handling this better than I am. I’m falling apart. There must be something really wrong with me.

Some examples of healthy replacement thoughts:

- I’m having a hard time right now, but I know there is a purpose for this season in my life, even though I can’t see it right now. I’m choosing to trust that I can struggle well in this, learn some good things about myself and my God, and be delivered into another season in my life. This season is not permanent. God does have a purpose and plan for me and I can learn to hear His
guiding voice and receive all He has for me now and in the seasons to come.

- I’m not a failure nor an idiot. Like millions of other people now and throughout the ages, I’m going through a hard time and I’m struggling. I’m in good company and I can learn from this dark season probably even more than I’ve learned from the seasons of light in my life. I don’t like it, but this is where I am right now, so I choose to trust and make the most of this experience.

This kind of thought monitoring and adjusting process is part of what happens in Cognitive therapies. Cognitive therapy has similar rates of effectiveness as medications in the treatment of depression symptoms. Furthermore, the results of this type of therapy, when the technique is practiced regularly and becomes habit, actually last longer than the results of medications. And there are certainly less side effects!

In a nutshell, cognitive therapies involve detecting the lies you believe and replacing them with the truth. One experiences the best results when the truths are rehearsed until they are not just new thoughts, but become beliefs.

A good Christian book to consult for help with this kind of process is Robert McGee’s “Search for Significance.” At the end of the book, McGee has created an easy-to-follow process called the Trip In and the Trip Out.

The Trip In helps you detect the lies you’re believing. It sounds easy enough, but the lies we believe are often cloaked in convincing phrases that are really twists on truth. So, at first glance, you often don’t see your lies as lies. McGee’s book helps you detect some of the main spiritual lies.

The Trip Out process helps you formulate the truths that combat the lies you believe. You then practice replacing the lies and rehearsing the truths until the true thoughts become habit.

This is NOT just a positive thinking exercise. Positive thinking does nothing for you if the positive thoughts are just a form of denial of the truth. Cognitive therapy techniques should help you face the truth of your situation, but also help you realize all the assets and resources you have at your disposal. Gaining a true perspective of your challenges and your resources helps your mind and body gear up chemically and emotionally to rise to the challenge with motivation and hope. Since our thoughts actually change the chemicals our brains send through our bodies, habitual truthful thinking can also, with practice and in faith, change our emotions and our ability to think creatively and live more healthy lives.
On a spiritual note, in the Word we are told to take every thought captive and make it obedient to Christ. This is a very practical process that we can practice on a daily basis and find relief in the midst of the storm.

The process of becoming more aware of and intentional about our thinking process requires focus and creativity. It’s not necessarily an easy process when you are just beginning. It’s good to do this with a well trusted friend who is also willing to engage the process as it’s often easier to see and learn from someone else’s process than it is our own, since we’re so emotionally invested in our belief system.

In addition to the possibility of practicing your belief work with a friend, you may want to do this initial, preparatory exercise to get yourself into a creative, more focused frame of mind:

An Exercise: Become aware of the Thieves that come into your mind to steal from you. Learn how to shut these thieves down lest they steal your focus, energy, peace and creativity:

"To do lists"
"Worries"
"Yes, buts…"

How might you shut these thieves down without giving them too much attention? I ask this question because often when we become overly focused on what we don’t want to do, we do more of that very thing because that is what we are giving our attention and focus to.

So, some ways to gently deal with the thieves without giving them too much attention: For the “To dos” and “Worries,” jot them down so you know you’ll get back to them later, at an appointed and limited time. Give them their place and time, but don’t let them be constantly operating in the background, robbing more of your time and energy than they deserve. Then, re-focus on the task at hand.

You might wonder what I mean by the “Yes, buts.” Well, have you ever found yourself spending more time and energy arguing why some new idea won’t work than spending your energy on creative problem solving? Or, have you ever lived with an adolescent (or a person who seems just like one) who just knows a million reasons why whatever solution anyone offers absolutely will not work? If you have experienced either, or both of these situations, you have encountered the notoriously draining “Yes, buts.”

With the “Yes, buts,” the best tactic is to just say “No” to these guys. These guys are nay-sayers that keep you stuck, drain your energy and prevent you from getting creative and growing in new ways. Shut them down. Start to become aware of when they operate and in what ways they show up in your
life. Make it a point to recognize them and weed them out. Take your energy back from them so you can open up to new ways of thinking; so you can re-discover your focus, creativity and hope.

**Physical Perspective**

Again, I begin this section with another disclaimer. I am not a medical doctor, nor do I play one on t.v. This is NOT medical advise. Seek the advise of your physician for your medical issues. AND, recognize that your physician is your health care consultant, not your health care god. You are ultimately responsible for monitoring your health and making the wisest decisions for yourself; therefore, you need to educate yourself about health, wellness, nutrition, exercise, prevention and diseases that you may struggle with. Take your body seriously.

How seriously do you care for your body? Do you consider the impact of your diet, exercise and rest on your emotions, on your ability to think clearly and creatively, and your immune system's capability of meeting the challenges of your environment?

In the modern information age, and especially in a city environment, much is demanded of our bodies. There are so many stimuli beckoning our attention and response. We have to make millions of decisions every day about what to attend to, what to ignore or schedule for a later time, and formulate how we can best respond given our priorities, values, circumstances and resources. We are constantly assessing, prioritizing, making choices and responding. In order to do this well, we must take good care of our bodies. While the demands on us are great, we also have great hope because our bodies are miraculous in meeting challenges and even fighting off toxins and viruses that come our way - if we take good care of them.

Recent research results resoundingly show the truth of Psalm 139:14: We truly are fearfully and wonderfully made. Our bodies and brains are more amazing than we even know. Modern science continues to discover just how miraculously we have been created, and we don't even know the half of it.

One of the buzzwords of the day in brain research is "neuroplasticity." Basically, this is a big, fancy word that means our brains are amazingly resilient and capable of repair and new growth well into our old age. And when our brains and nervous system are that resilient, that profoundly affects the resilience of the rest of our bodies. Knowing the truth about our bodies and the incredible capabilities we've been give by our Creator to meet the demands of our lives can really give us hope and healing.

In order to access this hope and healing, we need to live our lives trusting in God's guidance and Lordship, and following His ways. I'm not preaching a health and wealth gospel, nor a 'quid pro quo' one saying if we do so and so, God will heal us of everything while we live on this earth. I don't mean
to imply that if we obey God's ways we won't have struggles, pains, illnesses even. I mean that when we walk in His ways we will experience a peace and joy and wellness that goes beyond our circumstances. And living in this faith can often bring healing to our bodies and can alter our circumstances.

So, what does it mean to live in faith physically and follow the Lord's ways? Well, the scriptures say our bodies are the temples in which the Holy Spirit dwells. How are we called to care for this sacred space?

I am very passionate about eating healthy, raw fruits and vegetables, unprocessed grains, lean meats, and dairy free from chemicals and hormones. We need to move away from eating the kinds of processed and chemically altered foods of the typical American diet. I'm passionate about getting good aerobic, weight bearing, and stretching exercises. I'm also pretty serious about the need for good rest and good sleep.

I think we find many examples in the Scriptures about taking care of our bodies rather than indulging on rich fare and living sedentary, unhealthy lifestyles. We can look to the prophet Daniel and how he resisted the rich, unhealthy fare of the King's table. We see warnings throughout the Torah about becoming set in our unhealthy ways when we've built our houses and had our fill of fine foods (Deuteronomy 11). I'm going to resist the temptation to get on a pulpit over this. But, I will issue some encouragements. For more information on nutrition, exercise and depression and anxiety, see the following websites:  
http://www.anxietypanic.com/nutrition.html,
http://www.nutrition4health.org/NOHAnews/NNW05Ross.htm,

Don't go overboard trying to change everything in your life at once. Choose a few things that resonate deeply with you and enter gently into them. Set attainable, kind goals. Do what you can to make them enjoyable. Practice new activities/habit with friends or family. The scriptures tell us that the joy of the Lord is our strength. Pray for the Lord to open the eyes of your heart to the joyfulness in making small, kind, loving changes in your life.

*Breathing*

This may sound odd, but as a general rule, most of us don't breathe very well. Our typical breathing pattern is inefficient at getting proper levels of oxygen to our brains and throughout our bodies, and it tends to promote the production and circulation of stress hormones. I'm going to, in a very simplified manner, explain two general types of breathing.
1. Shallow Breathing

Most of us typically practice this kind of breathing. When we breathe in, we typically fill the top part of our lungs with air and our chest rises as we inhale and falls as we exhale. This kind of breathing can prompt the stress response in our bodies and can actually increase symptoms of anxiety.

2. Deep Breathing

When we breathe deeply, we push the air down into our lower lungs. When we breathe in, our lower abdomen rises, and when we exhale, it falls. This kind of slow, regulated breathing increases healthy levels of oxygen throughout our bodies and brains, promotes relaxation, takes less energy than shallow breathing, and therefore increases the possibility for clear, creative thinking. And, it decreases our anxiety response.

For instructions on how to practice deep breathing, see the following website:
http://www.anxietypanic.com/breathing.html practicing proper breathing is a relatively easy thing to do; and it's free! Try it - you'll like it :) Start by practicing it for just 10 minutes a day, before bed, or when you find yourself getting anxious. Remember, set attainable, gentle goals. Lifestyle changes happen in small, gentle steps, not huge, violent bounds.

Mental Exercises

Our brains need exercise, too. And while bodily exercise helps our brains, they need their own special kind of workout as well. Check out some free online brain games at this site:
http://www.brainmetrix.com Have fun with this - it is not a competition.

Tune Into Your Body

Spend some time each day being still and quiet and prayerful. In this hectic, over-stimulated culture in which we live, many of us have lost touch with our bodies. Notice where you carry tension. Pray, asking the Lord to help you learn to let Him carry the burdens. Ask Him to teach you to relax those tense muscles, to teach you to trust Him and to literally let go of the stress and tension. There are several massage schools in Memphis and Collierville that give massages at incredibly low prices. If you find you are having trouble relaxing in those tense areas, get a massage. Go to a free exercise class where you can learn to stretch and breathe in ways that reduce the tension in your body. It's not easy to let go of control and learn to trust. That's why the writer of the book of Hebrews tells us we must make every effort to enter the rest! You're spending effort either way; wouldn't you rather spend it towards rest and trust than striving and tension?
Relational Perspective

The influence of community on individuals is profound. It can be immensely healing, but, it can also be destructive. In times of stress, we need to surround ourselves with kind, understanding people who promote hope in our lives. We also need to limit or even step away from, for a time, those who are demanding, negative, pessimistic and draining.

There have been times in my life when the Lord called me to make some life changes. Especially when those changes involve mental and emotional perspective shifts, I have had to limit and even cut off certain friendships, even with people I dearly love. I had to recognize how much their viewpoints influenced me, then I realized how much energy it would require of me to still be around them and work towards changes in my own heart and mind. I decided it would be most honoring of my life’s call to spend my energy towards the changes God called me to rather than to try and engage those relationships while working through my season of change.

We always have choices to make, especially relational choices. And we must make them prayerfully, with kindness and godly wisdom. Begin to pray about your relationships. Ask the Lord which ones you need to invest in during this season of your life, and which ones you may need to pull away from for a time.

If you do not have the kind of positive, life-giving relationships you would like, consider looking for a support group. It is very important that you not isolate yourself during this time. There are many free support groups all around the Memphis area. You may have to be open to trying several out before you find one that is a good fit. Don't get discouraged if you don't find that good fit right away. Keep looking, and keep open to the fact that there may be something for you in every situation and encounter along the way. Practice looking for God's blessings and teachings in all situations, not just the ones that seem good at the moment.

May God bless you, may He open the eyes of your heart so that you may see His abundant blessings that are already yours for the taking. May He lighten your perspective to see His truth and His reality all around you. May you enter into His peace and His rest and find your strength and joy in Him. May you struggle well in this journey, and may the lessons you glean during this hard time bear much fruit in your life and the lives of others.

Shalom,

Lee Ann
Resource List

Overcoming the Job Loss Blues

Books:

- Walking with God – John Eldredge
- Depression: A Stubborn Darkness--Light for the Path by Edward T. Welch
- Running Scared: Fear, Worry & the God of Rest by Edward T. Welch and Susan Lutz
- Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands: People in Need of Change Helping People in Need of Change (Resources for Changing Lives) by Paul David Tripp (Paperback - Nov. 2002)
- A Quest for More: Living for Something Bigger Than You by Paul David Tripp and Walter Henegar
- A Shelter in the Time of Storm: Meditations on God and Trouble by Paul David Tripp
- Living in Dependency and Wonder, the Journey of Discovering the Depths of God's Love for You (Being With God, Book Seven) - Graham Cooke
- The Search for Significance - Robert McGee
- The Normal Christian Life – Watchman Nee
- Fear Less for Life - Stephen Arterburn, M.Ed., Paul Meier,M.D., Robert Wise, Ph.D.
- Healing is a Choice: 10 Decisions That Will Transform Your Life and 10 Lies That Can Prevent You from Making Them by Stephen Arterburn
- Hope when you're hurting - Larry Crabb & Dan Allender
- Cry of the Soul: How our Emotions Reveal our Deepest Questions about God – Dan Allender & Tremper Longman
- The Healing Path – Dan Allender
- The Pressure’s Off – Larry Crabb
• Simple Acts of moving forward: a little book about getting unstuck - Virginia Hampton Wright
• The Path - Laurie Beth Jones
• Ordering Your Private World - Gordon MacDonald
• Keep the Change - Becky Tirabassi
• 48 Days to the Work You Love – Dan Miller

Books For those who like to journal and write:
To Be Told - Dan Allender
Bird by Bird – Anne Lamott (itunes has a great audio of this called Word by Word)
The Artist's Way - Julia Cameron (not a Christian book, but a good process book through grief and recovery issues)

Websites:
Dan Miller:
http://www.48days.com/

John Eldredge
www.walkingwithgod.net - free podcast downloads on itunes

Graham Cooke:
This is a great free download to listen to when you’re struggling with hope and with knowing God is moving in your life in seasons of lack
http://www.outlawedwonderings.com/graham/index.html [Broken Link]
Recession Buster MP3s Graham Cooke

http://www.heburnsforme.com/Graham_Cooke.html
Graham Cooke Free MP3 downloads

Steve Arterburn's website: http://www.newlife.com
Free online sermons www.oneplace.com

Emotional Freedom Techniques (EFT):
Process tools that stimulate naturally occurring biochemical processes in the brain,
nervous system and body to free up stuck or negative patterns and establish healthier patterns.

These websites offer scientific information about EFT. The second site offers a free e-book of instructions so you can teach yourself the tool. If you are seeking help from a physician and/or counselor, talk with them about this tool. Note that many practitioners of this tool are not Christians and have differing world views. For information about how it fits with a Christian worldview, see below.

http://breakthroughperformance.net/resources/brain_chemistry.pdf
http://www.emofree.com

The following websites offer information about EFT from Christian Counselors who use the tool, integrating it with their worldview and faith:
http://fortbendccc.com/article/Is_EFT_Appropriate_for_Christians