

## Emotional Triggers

### What It Is:

An emotional trigger is anything – a word, tone, situation, or behavior – that causes a strong, often disproportionate emotional reaction. It’s your brain’s way of signaling a perceived threat, usually rooted in past experiences or unmet needs. The trigger itself isn’t the problem; it’s the meaning your mind instantly attaches to it.

### Why It Matters:

When you’re triggered, you react before you reflect. Awareness of your triggers helps you pause, name what’s happening, and choose a response that aligns with your values instead of your impulses. Leaders who understand their triggers stay grounded under pressure and create emotional safety for others.

*A trigger reveals where God wants to bring healing.*

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## Mental Models

### What It Is:

Mental models are the invisible filters through which you see the world. They’re formed by your beliefs, assumptions, and past experiences – the stories your mind tells to make sense of what’s happening around you.

### Why It Matters:

You don’t react to reality; you react to your interpretation of it. When you pause to ask, “What story did I just tell myself – and is it true, helpful, or hindering?” you create space to choose a better response. That awareness turns automatic reactions into intentional action.

*You cannot renew what you do not review.*

### 3 Brain States

#### What It Is:

God designed our bodies and minds with different responses for different moments. When life pressures rise, we don't always think from a place of peace or wisdom. Instead, we move through distinct internal states that shape how we see, feel, and respond.

Scripture shows this in the lives of David, Elijah, Moses, and many others—moments of fear, distress, and confidence in God.

Understanding the state you're in—and inviting God to lead you through it—helps you respond with clarity, self-control, and wisdom instead of being ruled by emotion or fear.

Brain State	What's Happening	Behavior Looks Like
Survival (flesh-led)	You feel unsafe or threatened.	You react impulsively: fight, flight, or freeze.
Emotional (flesh-led)	Your thoughts and emotions are stirred and unsettled.	Your reactions become personal, intense, and story-driven.
Executive (Spirit-led)	You feel anchored in God's truth.	You respond with clarity, self-control, and Godly wisdom.

#### Why It Matters:

Fear-driven and feeling-driven states cloud your judgment and distort your thoughts. Scripture calls us to **“be sober-minded”** and **“take every thought captive,”** which requires returning to a Spirit-Led State—where the Holy Spirit renews your mind, restores perspective, and guides your responses.

*“Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;” (2 Corinthians 10:5, KJV)*

## Survival State (The Alarm Center)

**Driving Question:** “Am I safe?”

### Examples of Christian Triggers

- Old wounds resurfacing
- Feeling judged or misunderstood
- Feeling excluded or overlooked
- A prayer that seems unanswered
- Harsh tone from a pastor or leader
- Sudden conflict with spouse or friend
- Being criticized or corrected in public
- Financial uncertainty or job instability
- Overwhelming expectations at home, work, or church

### Examples of Observable Behaviors

#### Fight

- defensiveness
- arguing, correcting sharply
- irritation or quick criticism

#### Flight

- withdrawing from people
- avoiding church or community
- escaping into busyness or screens

#### Freeze

- mental fog
- feeling numb
- shut down emotionally
- indecision – don’t know what to do

#### Physical Cues

- clenched jaw
- tense shoulders
- racing heartbeat
- shallow breathing

#### Spiritual Cues

- feeling unworthy
- difficulty praying
- God feels far away
- shame-driven thoughts

### Biblical Examples

- **David** – “When I am afraid...” (Psalm 56:3)
- **Adam & Eve** – hiding from God in fear (Genesis 3:8–10)
- **Elijah** – running for his life (1 Kings 19:3–5)
- **The Disciples** – fleeing when Jesus is arrested (Mark 14:50)

**Which of these triggers and or behaviors shows up in your life most often?**

## Emotional State (The Story Teller)

**Driving Question:** “Am I valued?”

### Examples of Christian Triggers

- Feeling dismissed or not heard
- Receiving feedback that feels personal
- Feeling overlooked, invisible, or left out
- Someone’s tone that “sounds like your past”
- A familiar pattern repeating in a relationship
- Feeling responsible for someone else’s feelings
- A memory that brings up embarrassment or regret
- Comparing yourself to others in church or ministry
- Being misunderstood by a spouse, friend, or leader

### Examples of Observable Behaviors

#### Blame Reactions

- “Why would they say that?”
- “What did I do wrong?”
- Assuming motives
- “It’s not my fault”

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#### Internalize Reactions

- ignoring your emotions
- overly critical of yourself
- constantly replaying conversations
- expecting the worst possible outcome

#### Relationship Reactions

- emotional outbursts
- reading between the lines
- overexplaining or apologizing excessively
- withdrawing but stewing internally

#### Biblical Examples

- **David** – “My thoughts trouble me and I am distraught.” (Psalm 55:2)
- **Adam** – blamed Eve for giving him fruit (Genesis 3:12)
- **EMartha** – “Lord, don’t you care...?” (Luke 10:40)
- **The Disciples** – “Don’t you care that we are perishing?” (Mark 4:38)

#### Physical Cues

- flushed face
- difficulty focusing
- pacing or restlessness
- tension behind the eyes
- sighing or shallow breathing
- tightness in chest or stomach

#### Spiritual Cues

- “God, why is this happening?”
- feeling spiritually inadequate
- imagining God is disappointed or silent
- assuming every verse you read is correcting or criticizing you
- difficulty receiving encouragement

**Which of these triggers and or behaviors do you notice in your own life?**

## Executive State (The Command Center)

**Driving Question:** “What is true?”

### Examples of Christian Enhancers

- remembering God’s faithfulness
- taking time to reflect before responding
- choosing humility instead of defensiveness
- a Scripture that brings peace or perspective
- asking for understanding instead of assuming
- recalling a past moment when God carried you
- pausing to breathe and pray instead of reacting
- hearing a word of encouragement from someone you trust
- recognizing “this is old me... I don’t have to respond that way anymore”

### Examples of Observable Behaviors

#### Thoughtful Responses

- pausing before speaking
- choosing words carefully
- asking clarifying questions
- responding with gentleness

#### Physical Cues

- steady breathing
- shoulders relaxed
- calm tone of voice
- clear, focused thinking
- slower pace, intentional movements

#### Wise Internal Processing

- separating facts from stories
- seeing situations from a bigger perspective
- identifying lies and replacing them with truth
- noticing emotions without being ruled by them

#### Spiritual Cues

- sensing God’s nearness
- choosing obedience even when emotions are loud
- letting God’s word speak for itself
- recognizing the Spirit’s prompting
- praying with confidence, not panic
- being able to receive encouragement

#### Relational Engagement

- listening fully
- expressing needs clearly
- staying present and grounded
- offering grace rather than reacting harshly

#### Biblical Examples

- **Jesus** – replying to temptation with truth (“It is written...”) (Matthew 4:1–11)
- **David** – When I am afraid, I put my trust in You.” (Psalm 56:3–4)
- **Nehemiah** – responded to conflict with prayer, planning, and courage (Nehemiah 4)
- **Paul** – remained focused and composed during crises (Acts 27)

**Which behaviors or cues do you recognize when you’re in a grounded, Spirit-led state?**

## Emotions Are Directives, Not Data

### What It Is:

Emotions are signals that something important is happening. They give you information about your needs, values, and boundaries – but they don't have to control your actions.

### Why It Matters:

When you treat emotions as directives, you react impulsively. When you treat them as data, you create space to choose your best response.

*Feel it but don't follow it.*

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## Name It to Tame It

### What It Is:

Labeling your emotion reduces its intensity and helps your brain move from Survival or Emotional State into the Executive State.

Emotion	What's It Telling You	Healthy Response
Anger	A boundary or value was crossed	Assert your need calmly: Let's talk when we're both settled.
Anxiety	You feel unsafe, uncertain or out of control	Focus on what you can control; ground yourself in truth.
Embarrassment	You feel exposed or judged	Acknowledge the moment with grace: That was awkward, but I'm okay. Then move on.
Hurt	Acknowledge the moment with grace: "That was awkward – but I'm okay." Then move on	Express the impact gently: When that happened, I felt...
Sadness	You've experienced loss, change or disappointment	Allow space to feel; reach for comfort rather than isolation.

## Anger

**Definition:** Anger rises when something feels unfair, violated, or out of alignment with God’s design. It signals that a boundary or value matters.

### How to Identify It

- Heat in the body
- Sudden surge of energy
- Tension in jaw, fists, or shoulders

### Sounds like

- “This is not okay.”
- “That crossed a line.”

### Looks like

- Blame
- Sharp tone
- Defensiveness
- Pacing or acting impulsively

### The Message Anger Is Trying to Tell You

- A line or value was crossed
- A boundary requires attention
- Something needs clarity or correction
- You feel unheard or powerless

### Biblical Truth

- “Be angry and do not sin.”  
– Ephesians 4:26

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## Anxiety

**Definition:** Anxiety is the emotion of uncertainty – when your mind imagines possible threat or loss and struggles to feel secure.

### How to Identify It

- tight chest
- restlessness
- racing thoughts
- difficulty breathing deeply

### Sounds like

- “What if this goes wrong?”
- “I can’t control this.”

### Looks like

- indecision
- overthinking
- seeking reassurance
- avoiding difficult situations

### The Message Anger Is Trying to Tell You

- Something feels unpredictable
- You’re anticipating a future loss
- You need grounding, truth, and presence
- You don’t feel fully safe or steady

### Biblical Truth

- “Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you.”  
– 1 Peter 5:7

## Embarrassment

**Definition:** Embarrassment appears when you feel exposed, watched, or afraid you've lost approval or social standing.

### How to Identify It

- flushed face
- desire to hide
- awkwardness
- internal “cringe”

### Sounds like

- “I can’t believe I said that.”
- “Everyone saw that mistake.”

### Looks like

- nervous laughter
- avoiding eye contact
- apologizing repeatedly
- replaying the moment in your mind

### The Message Anger Is Trying to Tell You

- Your image or reputation felt threatened
- You desire acceptance
- A moment touched an old insecurity
- You need reassurance of identity, not perfection

### Biblical Truth

- “Those who look to Him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame.”  
— Psalm 34:5

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## Hurt

**Definition:** Hurt is the emotional pain that comes from relational impact — when words, actions, or silence affect your sense of worth or belonging.

### How to Identify It

- heaviness
- withdrawal
- emotional sting
- tightness in chest

### Sounds like

- “That really wounded me.”
- “I didn’t expect that from them.”

### Looks like

- retreating
- shutting down
- becoming guarded
- overexplaining or defending

### The Message Anger Is Trying to Tell You

- A relational expectation was broken
- Something meaningful mattered
- You need repair or reassurance
- You’re longing for connection

### Biblical Truth

- “He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.”  
— Psalm 147:3

## Sadness

**Definition:** Sadness emerges when something valuable is lost – a relationship, expectation, season, opportunity, or hope.

### How to Identify It

- fatigue
- quietness
- heaviness
- low motivation

### Sounds like

- “I miss what used to be.”
- “I didn’t want this to end.”

### Looks like

- tears
- slower pace
- withdrawal
- reflective silence

### The Message Anger Is Trying to Tell You

- Something mattered deeply
- A hope didn’t unfold as expected
- You need comfort, not pressure
- You shouldn’t carry this grief alone

### Biblical Truth

- “The Lord is close to the brokenhearted.”  
– Psalm 34:18

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## Joy and Peace

**Definition:** Joy and peace arise when your spirit, mind, and actions align with God’s truth – they reflect settled confidence, gratitude, and presence.

### How to Identify It

- calm
- warmth
- openness
- sense of grounding

### Sounds like

- “Thank You, Lord.”
- “I feel steady, even in chaos.”

### Looks like

- generosity
- relaxed posture
- patience and clarity
- connection with others

### The Message Anger Is Trying to Tell You

- Your soul is grounded
- You are safe and connected
- You are aligned with God’s truth
- This moment is strengthening you

### Biblical Truth

- “The joy of the Lord is your strength.”  
– Nehemiah 8:10
- “My peace I give you.”  
– John 14:27

## Notice ... Name ... Navigate Model

A simple model for taking your thoughts and emotions captive. (2 Corinthians 10:5)

### Notice:

#### What It Is

Becoming aware of your internal signals – your brain state, emotions, body cues, thoughts, and automatic reactions – without judgment.

#### Why It Matters

If you can't see it, you can't address it.

Noticing interrupts the automatic reaction cycle and opens space for God to meet you where you are.

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### Name:

#### What It Is

Identifying and labeling the specific emotion you're feeling – anger, anxiety, embarrassment, hurt, sadness, or joy/peace – and acknowledging it honestly before God.

#### Why It Matters

Naming reduces the emotional intensity and brings clarity. It shifts you from reacting instinctively to responding with understanding.

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### Navigate:

#### What It Is

Choosing your next faithful step – aligning your response with truth, wisdom, and the leading of the Holy Spirit.

#### Why It Matters

Choosing your next faithful step – aligning your response with truth, wisdom, and the leading of the Holy Spirit..

## Apply Notice ... Name ... Navigate Model

### Instructions:

You've learned the brain states and the six core emotions. Now we want to see how David walked thru the Notice, Name and Navigate in Psalm 55. We're not studying the Psalm for theology right now. We're simply observing how a real person talks honestly with God while under stress. As you read, don't analyze. Don't try to interpret every phrase. Just pay attention to David's experience as goes from triggered to transformed. Here's what to look for:

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### Notice what David is experiencing

Look for anything that shows David's internal signals:

- Physical cues: trembling, anguish, restlessness
- Emotional cues: fear, overwhelm, hurt
- Mental cues: racing thoughts, desire to escape
- Spiritual distress: feeling unheard or troubled
- Brain States: Survival or Emotional language

He is observing, not hiding. This is Notice.

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### Name (what David is feeling)

Look for where David identifies or expresses emotions, such as:

- Anxiety: fear, trembling
- Hurt: betrayal by a friend
- Anger: frustration or outrage
- Sadness: grief over broken relationship
- Brain states: Survival or Emotional language

He is naming his emotions honestly before God. This is Name.

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### Navigate (what David chooses to do with God)

Look for the moment he turns toward God and chooses truth:

- calling out to God
- choosing faith over fear
- trusting God to sustain him
- remembering God's character
- casting his burdens on the Lord

He shifts from reaction to trust. This is Navigate.



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John Bentley knows leadership shouldn't feel like dragging a boulder uphill.

He's spent more than 40 years leading and developing others—21 in the Air Force and 20 more as a civilian leader with the Army. He's been in the tough spots, made the hard right calls, and learned what it takes to build trust and lead well under pressure.

Today, John helps leaders stop reacting and start taking *ownership* so they can lead themselves with clarity and confidence. He's the founder of Power 2 Transform and I Lead Me, and has worked with organizations across industries, including aerospace, finance, government, healthcare, nonprofit, and technology.

He also leads the You Are A GIFT Foundation, which helps moms heal and rebuild after addiction. John is a three-time author, contributor to the audio program *17 Biblical Principles of Success*, and just published his new book — *I Lead Me: Choose Your Action, Earn Their Trust, Lead With Purpose*.



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