

“If you’re searching for peace, calm, and relief from anxiety, *Finding Rest* will help you find those, not just because of what the book focuses on but because of *who* it focuses on. True rest will never be found outside of the One who created it, and that person is Jesus Christ. Jon’s found that to be true. I’ve found that to be true. And I believe, through reading this book, you will too.”

KIRK CAMERON, actor and producer of *Revive Us*

“In *Finding Rest*, Jon Seidl offers significant help to those suffering from mental health issues and those caring for loved ones who do. Having known Jon as both his pastor and friend, I know this book has been birthed out of a deep conviction to address a topic that sadly has often been shunned in Christian circles. I admire his courage and believe this is a great resource for the church. Jon draws on Scripture and his own experiences to help people unashamedly plot a healthy course through the murky waters of mental health issues. Honest, practical, realistic, and full of hope, this book points us to Jesus, the One who gives us rest for our souls.”

AFSHIN ZIAFAT, lead pastor of Providence Church, and council member for The Gospel Coalition

“All Christians need to understand a truly biblical perspective about mental health issues like anxiety, OCD, and depression. Jon shares that brilliantly and carefully here, supported by stories of his own challenges, decisions, and great victories. Your view of God, His love for you, and your trials will change in all the best ways when you read this. You may feel known for the first time. If you’re the friend of someone who struggles, you’ll understand them and their doubts more than ever before. Everyone will find compassion, great hope, practical power, and spiritual inspiration in these pages. You won’t be overwhelmed or shamed. In a perfect world, everyone would read this book.”

DR. KATHY KOCH, founder of Celebrate Kids, Inc.,  
and author of *Five to Thrive*

“For those feeling alone or confused and needing answers to the why of their anxiety, this is your book. As Jon relates from his own experiences and spiritual journey, there is purpose in your pain. Jon helps you embrace your struggle and find hope in your beautiful life.”

MICHAEL DAWSON, licensed professional counselor

“There’s often an unfortunate hesitancy among Christians to admit that we too battle anxiety and depression. The quest for perfection and the confusion that can envelop us is often overwhelming, even suffocating. But in *Finding Rest*, Jon Seidl offers a raw and selfless look at his own struggles and victories, sending us on a thought-provoking journey toward our ultimate hope: Jesus. Seidl masterfully breaks down the pathway to peace that is desperately sought by so many.”

BILLY HALLOWELL, author and journalist

“This book is unflinchingly honest, gripping, and full of truth that points readers to our Creator and the purpose for which He put us on Earth. It’s for everyone: most, if not all of us, know someone or love someone who battles anxiety or OCD. This book gave me a deeper understanding of these mental struggles and greater empathy, enriching how I interact with those who are fighting internal battles I may never see. Jon also has a talent for dropping nuggets of gospel-centric truth that will resonate with me for years. This is essential reading for both the individual believer and the community of believers.”

DAVID UBBEN, sportswriter with *The Athletic*

“Jon’s voice is a powerful and necessary force in today’s world. With a graceful balance between practicality and spirituality, Jon shares his story of walking through the dark woods of mental illness yet claiming victory along the way. His honesty blazes the path as he leads us bravely into the most vulnerable parts of anxiety and how we talk about it. This is a manual for anyone who needs to know they’re not alone and that God is in the fight, carrying them through the fire.”

HANNAH BRENCHER, author of *Fighting Forward* and *Come Matter Here*

“Now more than ever, so many people are fighting mental health battles and desperately need hope. They need to know they’re not alone, they need someone to tell them it will be OK, and they need a guide that shows them why. Jon Seidl is that person, and *Finding Rest* is that guide. If you are tired, beaten down, and looking for hope, these words will be water to your soul.”

MEGAN ALEXANDER, *Inside Edition* correspondent, and author of *Faith in the Spotlight*

“Everyone needs this book—executives, students, parents, pastors, leaders. Even if you don’t struggle with anxiety yourself, this book will help you support those in your life who do. Jon leads an open, honest, and thoughtful exploration of what it means to experience depression and anxiety as a Christian. He gives room for questions, yet provides clear answers that many are searching for.”

BRIAN AND GABRIELLE BOSCHÉ, authors of *The Purpose Factor*

“I was with Jon the day he first told the world his secret about battling anxiety. I’ve seen the change in his life as he’s implemented the principles he talks about, and I know that God is working through them. *Finding Rest* is powerful: anyone with a mental health struggle needs to read it and find the rest that Jon has found in Jesus.”

JOHN HUMPHREY, executive producer for I Am Second

“If you or someone you love is dealing with the torture of anxiety, Jon’s relentless vulnerability about his own hardships will bring you the words of peace you’ve been desperate to hear. Jon has not only struggled but is still struggling, and he lays bare his heart and his failings as well as his continuing progress to healthier living and understanding. In Jon, you’ll find a kind, empathetic, and humble friend. In the God he leans on, you’ll find true rest and help.”

ADAM GRIFFIN, coauthor of *Family Discipleship*

“God has used and redeemed Jon’s struggle so profoundly and powerfully that he has learned to see how God works all things ‘for your good and His glory.’ What an extraordinary message! Every page of *Finding Rest* is packed with tangible and timely wisdom. Anyone who is fighting a mental health battle needs to read this right now.”

RAJ NAIR, media director for the Israel Collective

“Mental illness is a topic the church often avoids, which is why this book is so important. Through his own story of anxiety and OCD, Jon shows us how to be honest and vulnerable about our struggles—and how to have hope and joy even in the darkest moments.”

DAVID ROARK, executive producer of the *Culture Matters* podcast, and  
coauthor of *Take Heart*

“Oh my. This book. From the very first paragraph, I knew I’d found a safe place among its pages. Jon Seidl’s raw and compassionate exploration of anxiety, depression, and OCD in the life of today’s Christian gives a voice to those of us who wonder if we’re irreparably flawed or faithless. (Spoiler alert: we’re not.) *Finding Rest* will rip away the stigma and shame that a misguided church has saddled on believers who struggle with mental health issues. Best of all, it guides us toward practical coping skills that strengthen our faith without suggesting we simply need more of it.”

BECKY KOPITZKE, author of *The Cranky Mom Fix*

“As a pastor entrusted with many stories filled with mental health struggles (including my wife’s battle with OCD), I can’t tell you enough how much this book is needed right now. The way Jon humbly weaves the weaknesses of his own story with the truth of the gospel is so honest, refreshing, and powerful. If you’re looking for hope in the midst of the hard, then you need to read *Finding Rest*.”

JOHN ELMORE, senior director of pastoral care at Watermark Community Church, and author of *Freedom Starts Today*

“As someone who has been through the valley of depression and written on the topic, I love what Jon Seidl has done in *Finding Rest*. His stories are incredible, his steps practical, and his takeaways powerful. If you’re looking to take control of what’s going on inside of you, then you need to read this book!”

BEN COURSON, best-selling author of *Optimisfits* and *Flirting with Darkness*

“In nearly a decade of cultivating leaders, especially within churches, I’ve consistently seen that when mental health, and specifically anxiety, is discussed, the results are often disappointing. That’s why *Finding Rest* is so important. Not only does it give those who are suffering practical tools, but it also gives church leaders the steps they need to take to better support their staff and congregation. I have learned so much from Jon in these pages, and I know you will too.”

HOLLY TATE, senior vice president of growth at Leadr

“If you want to be a better manager, boss, or leader, then you need to read this book. Even if you don’t struggle with anxiety yourself, you need to

understand what those around you and under you are going through. *Finding Rest* gives you the tools to do just that. Read it for yourself, then give a copy to every manager in your organization.”

KEVIN PAUL SCOTT, CEO of ADDO Worldwide, and author of *The Lens*

“From the personal stories, to the humor, to the nuggets of truth sprinkled like bread crumbs throughout, *Finding Rest* is powerful. Jon shows how faith and practical advice can coexist for anyone struggling with anxiety or other mental health issues. And the beauty is that he doesn’t speak just to the sufferer but to those around them as well. Everyone needs to read *Finding Rest*.”

JASON ROMANO, author of *The Uniform of Leadership*, and host of the *Sports Spectrum Podcast*

“As a survivor of mental illness, whenever I see a person of God share their story, I celebrate that we are one step closer to breaking down the stigma and releasing God’s shameless love. Jon Seidl shares his incredible story with great courage, vulnerability, and wisdom, confronting the complexities and unpredictable nature of anxiety and OCD and finding rest throughout it all. With his refreshing insight that mental health is a balance of mental, spiritual, and physical well-being, you will be comforted that you are not lost or alone, that Jesus is not mad at you, and that there is hope for a full and meaningful future.”

SARAH E. BALL, author of *Fearless in 21 Days*

“Even the strongest, most influential leaders can and do have mental health struggles. Those struggles do not care who you are or what you do for a living, and they can strike fast. If it hasn’t already happened to you, then you need to be prepared in case it does. *Finding Rest* shows you how to fight back. Jon’s clear and concise writing is something that leaders need in their toolbox, if not for themselves, then for those around them who may need it as well.”

STEVE FRENCH, founder and president of L<sup>x</sup> Partners

“More people are struggling with anxiety than ever before, but you can find steps to peace and victory through the experiences Jon Seidl shares in *Finding Rest*. An incredible writer and person, Jon combines humor, storytelling, and truth in a way that disarms. You won’t want to put this book down.”

MATT BROWN, author of *Truth Plus Love*, and founder of Think Eternity

“With so many people struggling with anxiety today, I’m so glad Jon took the courageous step to tell his story, ask the big questions, and share what has helped him along the way. This is not a quick-fix book—and that is a good thing. You will find helpful wisdom here, either for yourself or for someone you love who is battling anxiety.”

ARLENE PELLICANE, host of the *Happy Home* podcast,  
and coauthor of *Screen Kids*

“We need more honest stories like Jon’s, stories that move us toward healing and hope. If you are in the midst of a dark or difficult season, the vulnerability and biblical insight of this book will give you words for the pain you are feeling. Most importantly, though, it will lead you to Jesus, our ultimate source of rest in every season and circumstance.”

PATRICK AND RUTH SCHWENK, cohosts of the *Rootlike Faith* podcast, and  
coauthors of *In a Boat in the Middle of a Lake*

“Decades of work in the human resources world have shown me firsthand that mental health struggles, especially anxiety, are real and increasing. People who find themselves battling these paralyzing feelings that disrupt their daily lives will benefit from reading *Finding Rest*. Jon has the rare ability to articulate clearly his journey with anxiety and OCD, creating invaluable insights for those in a similar place. This book should be required reading in the business world, so we can all become more understanding of hurting people.”

TOM DARROW, founder and principal of Talent Connections

“In *Finding Rest*, Jon Seidl provides an honest, practical look at anxiety, faith, and life. Through his own struggles, Jon has discovered a biblical response to the challenges so many followers of Christ face. The church’s approach to mental health has been incomplete at best, and this resource will better equip the body of Christ to walk alongside people with these needs.”

SCOTT KEDERSHA, marriage pastor at Harris Creek Baptist Church, and  
author of *Ready or Knot?*

# FINDING REST

A Survivor's Guide  
to Navigating the Valleys of  
Anxiety, Faith, and Life

JONATHON M. SEIDL



KREGEL  
PUBLICATIONS

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## F O R E W O R D

I'VE KNOWN JON PERSONALLY AND professionally for many years. We've laughed, learned, and dreamed together. During that time I've come to understand his heart and his character. I've also come to understand his struggle with anxiety—a struggle that I know others deal with as well. (I've also come to understand why he's always so quick to return emails!)

As I've traveled the country for decades and talked with people at conferences and read the comments during our online fireside chats in my backyard, I've noticed an influx of people who are hurting and dealing with mental health challenges. Chief among them seems to be a struggle with anxiety. And in light of how the world changed in 2020, that has only increased.

So when Jon started talking to me about a book on anxiety and mental health, I knew how important it was. I also knew how uniquely positioned he was to talk about those topics. In *Finding Rest*, Jon has written something so special that others can't help but be drawn to it.

What I love about the conversation you're about to have in the ensuing pages is that Jon's words come from a place of profound experience. He's been there. He is there. He knows better than most what it means to battle anxiety and how to forge a path to victory. He also treats it with care and pushes the conversation to places that it hasn't often gone in the church. For example, he gently balances the spiritual and physical aspects of mental health, showing you how important it is to focus on both in order to find rest.

## FOREWORD

In that way, this book is unique. Instead of having to search out multiple resources on the topic, you can learn how to attack anxiety both physically and spiritually right here. I think that's invaluable.

As a bonus, this faith-filled guidance is beautifully written and, at times, funny. *Finding Rest* is the type of book that you read not only for the content but also for the way it is constructed. It's exactly what the church and her members need right now. Many of you know me as a student of history, and as I've learned through all of my studies, the writings of people who are genuine, faithful, and truthful will endure. I believe Jon's words here will endure for years to come. You'll find them encouraging not just the first time you read them but the second and third times too, as I won't be surprised if you return to drink from the book's deep well of knowledge.

If you're searching for peace, calm, and relief from anxiety, *Finding Rest* will help you find those, not just because of what the book focuses on but because of *who* it focuses on. True rest will never be found outside of the One who created it, and that person is Jesus Christ. Jon's found that to be true. I've found that to be true. And I believe, through reading this book, you will too.

I'm excited for your journey to begin—for what you will find and, most importantly, who you will find.

Godspeed,  
Kirk Cameron

## I N T R O D U C T I O N

# TELLING THE WORLD MY SECRET

TO SAY I PLANNED ON telling the world my secret would be a lie.

I didn't have some grand desire to reveal what I had only recently discovered but had been hiding ever since. It was January 2016, and I was working at a Christian nonprofit called I Am Second. If you don't recognize the name, chances are you'd recognize the work. They're the ones that use a white chair, a single overhead light, a dark room, and dramatic music to tell gripping stories of some of the most famous celebrities and athletes in recent memory, everyone from Clayton Kershaw to Chip and Joanna Gaines. The stories are intimate, deep, and personal. They are stories of hitting rock bottom, stories of immense pain, and ultimately stories of true hope.

It was being around those stories that I think led me to open up the way I did and tell my own. My role at the organization was to develop written content to publish between video releases, as well as to oversee any writing related to the videos: descriptions, marketing language, anything that would support and highlight the powerful stories. I cultivated a team of freelancers who were producing some

## INTRODUCTION

incredible content for us on our blog. One writer in particular got extremely vulnerable, talking about her depression, her loneliness, and even her suicidal thoughts as she navigated life as a young woman in New York City.\* After reading and editing one of her stories, I was, I guess you could say, a little convicted.

*Here you are asking other people to bare their souls, and you know you're holding out,* I told myself.

So one afternoon I went for it. I didn't tell anyone beforehand, not even my wife. I just started writing. Words, thoughts, and ideas came flooding out. What resulted was the most honest piece of writing I had produced to that point. The title was just as honest: "It's Time to Tell the World My Secret." And here's how it started:

We talk a lot about being real, raw, and relatable around the I Am Second office. I'm about to be more real and raw than I planned on being when I first started working here.

As I sit here writing this, I'm a little tired. Not because it's 3:15 in the afternoon, but because I took my medication at lunch. My medication makes me tired. That's why I usually try to take it at night. And that's part of the reason there are days I go to bed at 7:30 p.m. (I say "part" of the reason because the truth is I also have an 8-month-old daughter who likes to get up anywhere from 4:30–5:30 a.m.)

See, I have a secret that I've kept from a lot of people. I've told close friends and family. But I still have a fear about coworkers, bosses, and others knowing. I think the big reason is I don't want anyone to ever use the excuse, "Oh, that's just the \_\_\_\_ talking," or, "Oh, you're acting that way/feel that way because of the \_\_\_\_."

But something has been happening lately. Karis Rogerson has been taking space on this blog to be vulnerable about her

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\* Having lived in New York City myself for nearly seven years, I can say that it is one of the most populated yet loneliest places in the world. It's so easy to fade into the background and become another unknown face.

struggles. She's incredible. She's inspiring. She's challenged us to talk about our problems so that they can't control us. And I thought it time to follow her lead. Likewise, the newest member of the I Am Second team, Caitlin McCoy, vowed to get really vulnerable with you. I respect that. A lot. And what better way to hold her to that than to put myself out there, too?

So want to know what medication I take? It's called Fluoxetine. You probably know it as its name-brand equivalent: Prozac. It's a popular antidepressant. I don't struggle with depression. (In fact, a lot of people say I'm one of the most joyful people they've met.)\* But Fluoxetine can also be used to treat some other things. Those "other things" include anxiety and obsessive-compulsive disorder.

I have been diagnosed with anxiety and OCD.

You have no idea what's going on inside me right now admitting that to the world. To my bosses. To everyone I work with, have worked with, and will work with.<sup>1</sup>

I still feel a little something inside of me when I reread those words. Not fear, not dread, but emotion. Admitting you have anxiety and OCD, or any type of mental health issue, is terrifying. If I'm honest, every once in a while something happens that makes me wonder if it was the best decision. But then I'm quick to remember the reaction I received to telling my secret and those thoughts fade. Seriously, the emails, letters, and comments people sent me were so overwhelmingly positive that it makes every little twinge worth it. I had high school friends and acquaintances—the type you never expect to hear from again, the ones who seemed to have it all together—seek me out to tell me about their own struggles and thank me for giving them a voice. Complete strangers were messaging me in droves, even contacting my

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\* Those words about not having depression were written before I, well, had depression. And before I understood that "appearing happy" wasn't a way to ward it off.

## INTRODUCTION

wife and asking for her advice on how to help a loved one who is struggling.\*

The most stunning response was from a stranger named Jason.

“You’re probably never going to read this, but I think this article saved my life,” he wrote on Facebook. “Not really sure how to say thank you.”

It’s hard to put into words what reading that did to me at the time. What it still does to me. And from there, the comments kept pouring in:

Thank you so much for sharing your story. There are many, many of us who struggle through depression/anxiety and other issues and take meds, and sharing your story helps us feel we are not alone in secrets.

Your stories mimic mine. But I failed myself by stopping my meds because I didn’t want to feel broken. I want to thank you for your honesty and vulnerability in posting your struggles. It was an awakening for me.

I was so afraid to call my anxiety what it was for so long. . . . I thought that medicine was a crutch and I should have control over my own mind enough to overcome those feelings. I kept it hidden from everyone and spent a good amount of time in emotional agony in search of the root of my problem. . . . Thank you for taking the time to share and own your feelings, it’s really important to talk about that stuff and I just want you to know how much I appreciated it!

Wow! Everything you mentioned in the I Am Second article is me to a T. . . . I’ve never talked about these things to anyone. I really thought it was just me. My dad is a pastor so a lot of this stuff I feel like I can’t share. Thanks for showing me I’m not alone.

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\* This was a huge motivation for including that advice in chapter 9 of this book.

While I was encouraged by those comments, I was also heart-broken. The common thread in a lot of them was that the person had a mental health struggle, was a Christian, felt immense shame, was told that faith would “cure” them, and had zero support from their church or faith community as they fought their battle. Their families just didn’t understand what they were going through, medication and seeking help were demonized, they were restless, and they were alone. Many of them felt like the only way to get through their struggle was to hide it, ignore it, or deny it. In other words, they had to keep their secret inside. And I could relate. I felt many of those same things, and if not for the overwhelmingly supportive environment I found myself a part of at the time I came out with my secret, I’m not sure I ever would have been open about it.

And that’s why you’re reading this now. I want to tell your story by telling my story. I want to help you by putting into words what it’s like to be so confused and frustrated by what’s going on in your head that you retreat for hours, days, or sometimes years. I want to explain how you can address both the physical and spiritual aspects of what’s going on inside you and still have a deep and rich faith. I want to give family members who have been searching for answers some sort of relief and lifeline. I want to help the church better understand how to care for the members of the flock who have been misunderstood, misguided, or ignored. I want to help all of you finally get in the open what has been taboo and hidden. I want to show you how to take care of yourself. I want to help you understand what it means to take advantage of the common graces God has given us as tools in this fight.

I want to help you find rest—the type of rest that comes from understanding what’s going on inside of you, being understood by others, and knowing how to fight back with practical tools to overcome the disorder.\*

But ultimately I want to help you understand why this is happening

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\* We’ll clarify this more, but know that “rest” doesn’t mean a complete absence of your difficulties. I recently had surgery, and even though I was struggling with pain, I was still able to find rest during recovery.



## INTRODUCTION

and how God is still working in the midst of it. I want to help change your view of what it means to have faith during the trials, and even undo some of the harm that's been done to you in the name of God.

In other words, this book is meant to be used as a battering ram to break down physical, spiritual, and relational walls when it comes to mental health. It's for the person who struggles with anxiety and OCD and has built barriers around themselves, either intentionally or because they're confused by what's going on inside them.\* It's for the family member of that person, so they can learn how to empathize with their loved one and help tear away the layers of helplessness that often plague those forced to wade through the secondary effects. And it's for the church, which needs to be challenged to remove the thick stigma surrounding mental health and be Christ in real, hands-on ways to members who feel ostracized, lost, and hopeless.

This book is also meant to go deeper than I've ever gone while giving you practical and spiritual truths that you need to embrace, breathe, and live. The stories I tell feature new admissions that I've never talked about publicly. The truths are rooted in the only thing that has sustained me through the driest deserts and darkest valleys of my life: the gospel of Jesus Christ.



I come from a line of short people. I'm five foot six. My mom is four eleven. My sister is four eleven. My great-grandmother, as far as I can tell from pictures, was four eleven. My grandpa? Five foot five on a good day.

But my wife, Brett? Now, she's the complete opposite. She's at least five eight, and much taller in heels. (You should see some of the funny looks we get when we're on a date.) Her dad is well over six feet. Her grandpa? The same. Old pictures of her grandma reveal a stunning woman with "legs for days," as people like to say now. By the looks of

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\* We'll also talk about depression, though that is not the main focus.

it so far, my young daughter got her mom's genes. Unfortunately for my son, however, his height is about as Seidl as it comes.

Why am I telling you this? Because I want you to know that I am extremely honest about who I am. I am a short, stout man with cocktail weenies for fingers. I don't run away from it. I don't hide from it. I'm not ashamed to admit my shortcomings\* and weaknesses. I'm a little overweight, although as you'll read, I'm working on that for a variety of reasons. I find certain clothes I like and I wear them too much because I don't like wasting mental energy on picking out an outfit. I didn't go to school to be a writer. Instead, I went to college hoping to be the next press secretary of the United States of America. I fell into journalism by accident after discovering during a freshman writing class that I was kinda good at it. And I have anxiety and OCD.

I tell you who and what I am—even down to the small details—so you can trust me when I tell you what I'm not. I am not a psychologist. I am not a doctor. I am not a clinician or a counselor. I am not a pastor. I am not the traditional “expert” on anxiety and OCD. I don't have a PhD or a theology degree hanging on my wall. I have a Packers flag. I have not written thousands of pages of medical research, but rather thousands of stories about everyday life. This book is one of those stories, and it's written from a place of both deep struggle and profound understanding. Let me be clear: you, the reader, are not who I *was*; I *am* who you *are*. What I mean is that victory in this battle against anxiety and OCD doesn't mean I no longer have obsessive thoughts, it doesn't mean I don't have panic attacks, and it definitely doesn't mean I'm immune from experiencing new battles, like the depression I never saw coming. The difference between you and me is that I'm telling my story and what I've discovered along the way. I hope by the end of this book, even that difference will disappear as you become more comfortable talking about your struggles.

When it comes to mental health issues, I write from a place of deep personal experience and, yes, pain. Have I done my research to better

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\* See what I did there? I'm also a sucker for a good (or bad) pun.

## INTRODUCTION

understand myself? You bet. Remember, I have OCD, so I've probably gone a little overboard. Have I talked with professionals about it? Absolutely. Am I the subject's leading expert? Please, no. What you're about to read isn't from the mind of someone crafting peer-reviewed journal articles on the topic. It's from the mind of someone who, like you, many times can't shut it off.\*

For example, as I write this, it's 9:14 p.m. on a Tuesday night. When I woke up this morning, I had no intention of tackling this introduction. But as the day went on, I had an idea. That idea turned into something I couldn't shake, and now my mind won't stop until I get it out on paper. In many ways, this is the blessing of OCD. I don't let things slip through the cracks, and once I put my mind to something, I get it done.

But here's the thing: I don't ever want you to trade what I'm saying for the help I've found in seeking guidance from professionals. Think of this book as a long talk with a friend—the kind of friend who understands what you're going through and can talk to you about it over a rich cup of coffee, a tall glass of wine, or a cold beer. After you and I talk, I need you to take the next step and go even deeper with your community, mental health professional, or pastor.

In other words, I want you to use this book as a supplement or maybe even a jumping-off point. While my journey with anxiety and OCD started long before I got professional help, the process of fully understanding who I was only started once I allowed people far smarter and wiser than I am to begin speaking into my life.

This book isn't meant to cure you. In fact, I don't consider myself "cured" just because I have named and understand what is going on inside of me. But I do consider myself whole, because I'm approaching my disorder holistically and drawing closer to Christ as a result. That's what I want you to do. That's a concept I'll explain in depth later, but suffice it to say that I'm more than content to be a guide who turns your gaze inward so you can understand yourself, outward so you can

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\* Rest assured, though, this book has undergone a theological review.

realize how you affect and are affected by others, and upward so you can find the true source of rest. That's what I want you to take from this. Don't give me one ounce of credit more than that.

Read this book to find hope. Use it to get help. Embrace it to find rest.

## C H A P T E R 1

# CALL IT BY ITS NAME

A FEW YEARS AGO MY wife, Brett, and I had brunch with a group of friends from our small group at our church in Texas. It was the first time we had gotten together in a while, since kids and babies had started replacing game nights and cocktails.

As we sat there wrangling our children and making ridiculous deals with the toddlers to get them to take one more bite of their food, one of the women broke the news: “We’re pregnant!”

Cheers went up and hearty congratulations poured out. I’m not sure I have ever heard so many high-pitched “Ahhhhhs” in my life. Then something interesting happened. After someone asked the inevitable questions of “When are you due?” and “Do you know what it is?” a third question quickly followed: “Have you picked out a name?”

The couple had, but they slyly refused to tell us. It drove everyone nuts. We asked if we could guess, and when they said yes, it began a twenty-minute interrogation with every name possible being thrown against the wall to see if it would stick. (Think of a classic version of the game *Guess Who* breaking out in the middle of a packed restaurant. “Does this little person start with a *D*?”) I even went deep into the Bible and threw out *Tryphaena* and *Tryphosa*. No dice. Finally,

after a few hints we coaxed out of the couple's two-year-old, I guessed it: Charlotte. The screams for us figuring out the name were just as loud as when we got the baby news earlier. The tables near us cheered a little too, as by then they had become secretly invested in figuring out the name as well.

So here's the question: why is that? Why are we driven, seemingly inherently, to ask about a name? Why do we *have* to know what something or someone is called? The answer, in true *Beauty and the Beast* fashion, is as old as time.\*

For starters, it gives us control. In ancient Jewish culture, there's an idea that if you can name something, you have power over it. Think back to the garden of Eden. After God gave Adam dominion over the earth, Adam took on the task of naming every living thing. By naming them, he was in a position of control over them. When we name something, we own it. We take responsibility for it. We even protect it.

But names have another purpose beyond ownership and control. They allow us to communicate properly about whatever the thing or person is. They allow us to categorize it. They allow us to understand it. There's an exponential level of knowledge that comes with knowing someone or something's name. It can tell us so much. It's why our group of friends wanted to know the baby's name. Knowing her name would open up a whole new world of insight. In this instance, it would lead to a deeper understanding of the parents by then talking about why they chose that name, asking why it was important to them, and discussing things like family heritage.

We see this emphasis on names throughout the Bible. Moses longed to know the name of whom he was talking to in the burning bush. Jacob, while struggling with the stranger on the shore of the Jabbok River, asked for the assailant's name. The angel gave Mary Jesus's name—Emmanuel—when he appeared to her and announced the coming of the Son of God. Matthew spends seventeen verses on the

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\* This reference is almost solely in honor of my young daughter.

names in Jesus's genealogy, while Luke spends fifteen doing the same thing. That's a lot of names.

We want to name, and we want to know names. Only then, it seems, can we properly appreciate whatever it is. Only then can we understand it. Only then can we face it. The absence of a name—the unknown—is not only a powerless place but also a place of deep confusion.

That's how you could categorize a lot of my teen and young adult years. For twenty-seven years of my life, I had no idea what was going on inside of me—I didn't have a name for it. I was confused. I was angry. I was upset. I was frustrated. I had feelings I couldn't put into words. And I could never seem to turn off my mind.

*Why do I feel this way? Why can't I stop thinking about this? What am I so worried about? What's the worst that could happen? (Don't answer that!)*

My brain always seemed to be racing. Like a dog chasing its tail, it would go around and around and around . . . and around some more. Only, in those earlier days, I think a dog had a better chance of catching its tail than I did of slowing the exhausting cycle in my head.

My first "episode," as I recall it, happened when I was twelve. My mom, one of my sisters, and I were in our white Dodge Caravan pulling up to our country home in Wisconsin. Our house was set back about three hundred yards from the road, and the routine we had for getting the mail looked like Mom stopping at the end of the winding gravel driveway and one of us kids hopping out and walking to the mailbox situated right off the shoulder. Because of the Badger State's perpetual cold, my siblings and I would always argue over who had to make the mail run. On this day, I drew the short straw.

I pulled open the sliding door and ran toward the mailbox. After I grabbed the letters and various magazines, I brought them back and started thumbing through them. As the result of adding my name into some spammy internet pop-up, it wasn't odd for me to come across something with my name on it. But as I surveyed the mail I didn't see anything for me. That's when the thought, like one of those time-lapse

videos of a flower opening in the morning, began slowly spreading in my head.

*You aren't important. No one seems to care. You're not even special enough to receive a piece of junk mail.*

I remember it vividly. I can still feel the depths of defeat and woe-fulness that welled up inside, all over a lack of mail. It all came out of nowhere, like some dark, secret part of my brain had just been unlocked. I can still hear the voices. And I can remember the conversation as those voices traveled from my head to my throat along some invisible highway of lies.

I turned to my sister. "Well, Jenny, it looks like you got something. I didn't. No one seems to care about me. No one seems to think I'm special enough to even send me something. When's the last time you even got something for me, Mom?"

*Where is this coming from?* I remember thinking. I had no idea, but it just kept coming. If I close my eyes, I can still see the perplexed looks on both Mom's and Jenny's faces.

"Jonny, what are you talking about?" my mom said.

"Well, I just don't seem to matter to anyone. Sometimes I don't seem to matter to anyone here either," I replied.

"Jonny, stop it," my mom said somewhat dismissively. That only fueled the thoughts even more.

"I'm serious," I said. "Everyone else gets things in this family, but everyone forgets about me."

We pulled up to the house and all got out.

"Jonny, you know that's not true," my mom said as she shut the door.

Deep down I did. But by that point it was too late to pull myself out of it. The dog had darted from his kennel and was in full tail-chasing mode. I spent the rest of the night unable to convince myself to stop thinking the thought I didn't want to be thinking. It was that night that I first remember turning to a coping mechanism I would use for years in order to shut off my mind. I imagine you've probably found some sort of method too.



That mechanism involved a long-held dream of mine. I have always wanted to be in the FBI. The idea of being a federal agent chasing serial killers, criminals, and terrorists still excites me. I even took the FBI entrance exam several years back and passed, and if not for an injury to my shoulder that required surgery, you might not be reading this book right now.

On the night of that first episode, I lay in bed unable to think of anything but the “no one cares about me” lies in my head. It was exhausting. I was so tired but unable to sleep. That’s when I reached into the only part of my brain that didn’t seem to be controlled by the uncontrollable thoughts: my future glory with the FBI. To tune everything else out, I started creating a movie in my head where I was the star special agent. Where I mattered. I imagined what it would look like for me to burst through the door of some serial drug dealer and lead a raid that brought him to justice. It granted me the relief I so desperately needed. That scene—and a few more after it—played in my head until I fell asleep. Soon it became one of the only ways for me to find relief at night from my own mind. In other words, the only way to get a reprieve from my racing thoughts was to replace the unwanted ones with others that were just as furious but more palatable. Go figure.

But finding a way to cope was different than understanding what was going on inside of me. From that day on, I remember easily getting fixated on things. A girl, an idea, a thought, a comment from someone else, a fear, and especially a worry. Those thoughts would consume me. I remember looking at classmates in high school who lived more carefree lives than I did and it made me jealous. Not in an “I hate them” kind of way but in an “I want the relief you seem to have” kind of way. Imagine how confusing that was for a young Christian who was always told that if I followed Jesus and did the right things, others would want what *I* had.

Secretly, I never understood why anyone would want whatever this was.

For twenty-seven years of my life, to varying degrees, that was my

reality. I never knew why. I never could figure out why I just couldn't "get over it," whatever "it" was. That continued on through the early years of my marriage. Brett would do or say something and I would stew on it, replaying it in my head like some slow-motion, high-definition video and dissecting it into a million little pieces. It was slowly driving a wedge between us as I turned to other coping mechanisms like work, alcohol, and porn to try to find relief from the unceasing thoughts.

Then in 2014, the epiphany happened. It produced a name.



At the time, Brett and I were living in a loft in downtown Dallas. The bottom floor included a hip coffee shop we frequented, complete with reclaimed wood tables, concrete pillars, local art, and a stage in the corner for open mic nights and B-list musical acts. You know the type.

But for everything the coffee shop had going for it, there was one big deficiency. See, I like Sweet'N Low in my coffee (the pink stuff), not real sugar, not stevia, and especially not Splenda. The coffee shop stocked the pink packets from time to time but not on a regular basis. It was more of a Splenda place, which to me tastes a little like bitter sock water. I just gagged a little.

On this day, a Saturday I think, we decided to go on a walk around downtown. But first we needed our coffee. Brett took care of the drinks while I ran to the bathroom. I went out of my way to remind her that I wanted Sweet'N Low in it. If they didn't have any, I wanted it black. When I returned, I took a sip of the coffee and I almost spit it out. It was disgusting. It was awful. It was full of Splenda. I can't describe what happened in my brain. I didn't get enraged and lose it like a madman. But a rush of anger, disappointment, and "Why couldn't you do this one simple thing?" flooded over me. I didn't want to feel that way. I remember even telling myself, "This is not a big deal!"

But it was.\*

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\* Before I ever even had her read my first draft of this book, my wife suggested the title be *I Just Want My Sweet'N Low*.

My wife told me to get over myself. That's always been a trigger for me, so it just made it worse and threw me into a bad cycle, like when my mom told me to just "stop it" that day in our driveway. I walked out and left her alone in the coffee shop. Our day was ruined. Seriously. For the rest of the day I couldn't get over her putting the wrong sweetener in my coffee and then telling *me* to get over it. It was awful.

We didn't talk about it for the rest of the day. In fact, we didn't talk at all. The next morning, she expressed how helpless she felt. She was confused and hurt. The term "walking on eggshells" got used a lot as she reminded me this wasn't the first time. There were frustrated tears.

"Jon, your reaction was not normal," she said. She was right. It was my normal, but it shouldn't have to be hers. I apologized and told her I thought I needed to get help. I knew this wasn't right. It wasn't something she should have to endure. There were more tears, not just from her but from me. And even though she forgave me, she made me commit to getting some sort of help.

That's when I called my sister, who I knew had sought help for her mental health and had seen a psychiatrist. I explained to her what was going on.

"Jess, this is probably going to sound either really weird or really normal, but I have to tell you what happened," I said. As I told her the story, she chuckled. I remember thinking, *Why are you laughing?*

"Oh, Jonny, you definitely have it. Don't you know it runs in the family?" The "it" was anxiety and OCD.

No, I didn't.

She proceeded to rattle off all the family names like some kind of biblical genealogy. She gave me examples of her own struggles, like how she would get upset with her husband if he didn't mow the lawn a certain way. Hearing her say that triggered so many memories. I started thinking about my own examples.

Like how sometimes when cleaning the house with my wife, I would get inexplicably annoyed if she wasn't doing it in a certain order. "The floor before the dishes? Why?" Seriously. She would ask, "What's wrong? Why do you seem so upset?" It caused so much strife in our marriage.

I thought about how I would regularly reread emails (especially ones I sent) upward of fifty times, convinced there was an error I was missing or an unwanted tone I was accidentally communicating that I didn't pick up on the first forty-nine times. If I only read it one more time, I would finally be able to relax. That was rarely the case.

At times I would lie in bed at night, convinced I didn't lock my car. I would wake up at three in the morning with the locked-not-locked scenario in my head, get up, stumble through the living room, go to the car, and check the door. It was always, of course, locked.

I thought about all the things I just couldn't let go, like when my wife once scraped the car bumper during a minor parking-garage fender bender and I obsessed over it for a week. I could not stop thinking about it.

*How much is this going to cost? Why does this happen whenever we get nice things? Why couldn't she see the other car? What's this going to do to the trade-in value?*

I remembered the time I was driving to the grocery store. At the intersection, I heard a thump underneath my car. Any normal person would have thought, *Oh, I just ran over a piece of trash, or maybe a squirrel*, and not even given it a second thought. Me? I drove to the store and couldn't shake the feeling that I had run over not just something but *someone*. On my way home before I pulled into the driveway, I retraced my route. Not once, but twice (literally three minutes later) to make sure. I was looking for blood, for emergency vehicles, for people taking pictures. I still thought I had missed something when I got home. That scenario happened numerous times.\*

The conversation with Jess was an epiphany moment—so much made sense now. It was a relief. Scary, but still a relief. I hung up with her and immediately scheduled a doctor's appointment for the first psychiatrist in the area who had an opening for new patients. I needed

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\* The second title Brett suggested for this book? *I Thought I Ran Over a Human, but It Was Just an Ant*. She's got a great sense of humor. That said, one comfort I received when I finally told the world what was going on with me was that other people shared how they had this same fear of running over someone. It's not a completely uncommon worry among people with anxiety and OCD.

to find out if I did, in fact, have anxiety and OCD—and what I could do about it.



To say I obsessed about the appointment a lot over the next couple weeks would be an understatement. It continued through the day of the appointment. I remember sitting in the waiting room of the doctor's office, which was situated in a high-rise overlooking a major Dallas freeway.

*What if he tells me there's nothing wrong with me?*

*What if he says I'm overreacting?*

*What if there's nothing he can do?*

*What if . . . ? What if . . . ? What if . . . ?*

Ironically, the fact that I was obsessing so much over the questions was an answer in and of itself.

When the doctor—who looked like a slightly more polished version of Doc Brown from *Back to the Future*—finally called me in and asked me to tell him why I was there, my heart was racing. My mouth, which was as dry as the Sahara, could barely catch up to my brain. I'm already an excessive sweater, and I could feel the droplets forming everywhere. *Everywhere.*\* Somehow I managed to give him the examples that came to mind while on the phone with my sister. He nodded and took notes on a yellow legal pad. He started saying things that felt like he had cameras in my apartment, going through other scenarios and asking if I had struggled with any of them.

"Yes!" I remember shouting at one point, with my face and palms turned upward. "Thank you!"

Then the moment came. He smiled. "You have what's called generalized anxiety disorder with obsessive-compulsive disorder, OK?" He then explained what that meant.

At that moment, I almost broke down in tears. Not because I was

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\* One thing I've come to realize is that excessive sweating is a symptom of anxiety. It's caused by the fight-or-flight response the body goes through.

sad, but because I was so happy. I was relieved. I was overjoyed. I felt known. The terms *anxiety* and *OCD* didn't make me feel helpless. They made me feel powerful. I was finally able to name and understand what was going on in my head, in my relationships, and in my day-to-day life. I was finally able to make sense of who I was for the past twenty-seven years.



Since then, I've come to understand exactly what anxiety is, and with each discovery my world gets bigger. One of those discoveries is important to mention here. It relates to the interplay between anxiety and OCD. I have both, but not everyone does. It's like one of those classic word problems from school: all those who have OCD have anxiety, but not everyone who has anxiety has OCD. That's because OCD is a type of anxiety. It's a subset. That said, if you struggle with anxiety, it's not odd to have OCD tendencies.

"The struggle with obsessions and compulsions is a struggle with anxiety," explains Mike Emlet of the Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation. "Anxiety is the heart of this problem."<sup>1</sup>

In other words, I have anxiety, and my obsessive-compulsive disorder is the unhealthy way in which my brain tries to deal with that anxiety. Why tell you that? Because I want you to understand that even if you don't specifically struggle with OCD, everything I'm talking about here is still for you because the heart of the problem is something we share.



If you're reading this book, you've either named your own struggle or are on the path to doing so. Maybe you've struggled with anxiety for years, or maybe you realize something is "different" or "off" and you're looking for answers. I'm glad you're here. There is power in calling who you are and what you have by its name. It's biblical. It isn't a sign of

weakness. It's a sign of strength. Only after you name it can you begin to understand how to fight back and overcome.

Just ask my friend Noah. Like many people, he started experiencing anxiety seemingly out of nowhere during the coronavirus pandemic of 2020. About a year earlier, Noah had moved his family to Amsterdam for his job. They had barely settled into what life would be like as foreigners in a country they knew little about when the virus hit and upended everything all over again. Toward the end of April, at the height of the spring lockdown, he had to travel to Germany for work. That's when the fear and anxiety set in. Had he been nervous before? Sure. But this was different. This wasn't normal. This was something bigger. He is normally a calm, mild-mannered man. But the anxiety began transforming him into someone on edge, with severe heart palpitations and profuse sweating. And frankly, that was both confusing and paralyzing.

That's when he paused, took a step back, and really examined what was going on. That's when he realized what the issue was: he was having full-blown, raging anxiety attacks. It scared him a little to admit it, but he did.

"I don't think I knew what to call it at first," he texted me. "But now I am mature enough to admit it: fear, anxiety, and lack of control."

Admitting what was really going on led to freedom. Why? Because by recognizing and naming what was going on, only then could he properly address it. He was able to seek guidance, to draw closer to the Lord, and to find some answers. The almost debilitating fear of travel, the cycle of thoughts about "What if?" and the fear of the unknown that haunted him all dissipated only after he knew what he was facing. In other words, only after knowing how to ask the right questions was he able to find the right answers.

See, owning your diagnosis prevents your diagnosis from owning you. That's what I'm hoping you find in the coming pages. Hope. Hope that you don't have to be controlled by what seems uncontrollable.

Like what happened with Noah, so much in my life made sense to me once I was able to put a name to what was going on. It helped

## FINDING REST

me understand why I quit football—my passion since I was in fifth grade—as a high school junior (I had a raging fear of failing). It helped me realize why it had become so easy in college to fall into a porn addiction that lasted through the first few years of my marriage, despite waking up every day wanting to stop (obsessive thoughts and pictures more easily embed themselves in my brain). And it helped me understand my family history and some of their actions that had caused confusion in my life (it was hereditary).

But naming it also did something else. It started me on a journey that would give me a better understanding of all of my life's difficulties, as well as a clearer understanding of who God is and what He's up to.

That may not make sense at this point, but it will. I firmly believe that my anxiety and OCD can, have, and will be used for my good and God's glory. Whether you've named your own disease yet or not, I think you will too, by the end of this book.