



# Theology and THERAPY

DECEMBER 2025

STUDY NOTES

## Coping With Christmas

### KEY SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

- Psalm 42
- 1 Kings 19
- Matthew 4:11
- Mark 4:35–41

### A. The Clinical Definition

In psychology, coping refers to the cognitive and behavioral strategies we use to manage stress, emotional overload, or inner conflict.

Two major categories emerge:

- Problem-Focused Coping — trying to fix the situation
- Emotion-Focused Coping — trying to manage the emotional fallout

### MCKISSICK DEFINITION

- Coping is how you survive what you don't know how to fix.

### What the Numbers Say About December

- Depression rises 30–40% in December.
- Alcohol use jumps 22–36% as people self-medicate grief and stress.
- 45% of Americans call the holidays 'emotionally overwhelming.'
- 64% of people with mental health struggles say December makes it worse.
- Loneliness increases at least 30%.

- Financial anxiety peaks, family tension spikes, and grief — especially grief connected to empty chairs at crowded tables — resurfaces with force.

#### BISHOP'S CONCLUSION

- The holidays don't create emotional pain; they amplify the pain we never healed.

## The Dangers of Coping Instead of Thriving

### The Psychology of Pretending: When Coping Turns Into Hiding and Suppressing

- Suppression is NOT forgetting.
- It's remembering to pretend you forgot.
- This is why suppressed people feel tired: your mind is doing overtime managing a wound your heart never treated.

MY NOTES:

## Psalm 42: A Study in Coping

"My tears have been my food." (v. 3)

- This is coping through crying, emotional depletion.
- Tears become meals. Sorrow becomes sustenance.

"Why are you cast down, O my soul?" (v. 5)

- This is coping through self-talk.
- Internal dialogue becomes a survival mechanism.

"Why have You forgotten me?" (v. 9)

- This is coping through spiritual confusion.
- He feels abandoned by a God he intellectually and theologically knows is present.

MY NOTES:

## Mental and Theological Reorganization

"Hope in God..."

- Now engages in positive self-talk that is rooted in theological maturity and conviction.
- "I'm surviving... but I'm not stable."

MY NOTES:

### Case Study: Elijah

The Prophet Who Outpreached His Own Emotions

1 Kings 19

#### Elijah's Coping Patterns

##### 1. He runs.

- He flees to the wilderness (1 Kings 19:3).
- Avoidance coping: distance yourself from what scares you.

##### 2. He isolates.

- He leaves his servant behind (v. 4).
- Isolation is the emotional twin of depression.

##### 3. He collapses under a broom tree (v. 4).

- This is the biblical version of shutting the blinds and staying in bed.
- Fatigue coping.

##### 4. He prays to die.

- "It is enough; take my life."
- Emotional exhaustion masked as spiritual surrender.
- Be careful of your mouth — you have what you say.

##### 5. He sleeps excessively (v. 5).

- This is the body refusing to carry the emotions anymore.
- Physical shutdown as coping.

MY NOTES:

God's Response: The Divine Therapist's Treatment Plan

## 1. Rest and Nutrition

- "Arise and sleep again."
- God addresses his physiology before his theology (cf. Matthew 4:11).
- Restoring mental focus.
- Emotional anxiety — eat everything or nothing.
- Nutrition — a cake baked on the coals.
- The body cannot heal what the body cannot hold.

## 2. Emotional Processing

- "What are you doing here, Elijah?"
- Name the truth you've been swallowing.

## 3. Gentle Presence

- The still, small voice.
- When the soul is fragile, God whispers.

## 4. Purpose and Community

- "Go anoint... and call Elisha."
- Healing is not complete until purpose is restored and isolation is interrupted.

MY NOTES:

**Moving From Coping » Healing » Thriving**

## 1. Acknowledge What You've Been Avoiding

- You can't conquer what you won't confront.
- Elijah's healing started when he told God the truth he had been suppressing.

## 2. Rest Without Guilt

- Rest is not weakness; it is warfare.
- Repeatedly in the Bible, Jesus steals away to rest — even in a storm (Mark 4:35–41).

## 3. Tell Your Story in Safe Places

- "What are you doing here?"
- God pulls Elijah out of emotional hiding.

## 4. Embrace the Whisper

- Coping keeps you busy.
- Healing requires stillness.

## 5. Reclaim Purpose Gradually

- Thriving does not happen in leaps.
- It happens in steps.

## 6. Allow God to Break Your Isolation

- God refused to let him stay alone.
- Healing happens in healthy connection.

MY NOTES:

# Ending Reflection

Take a moment and answer these honestly.

1. What pain have you been coping with that you've disguised as normal?

2. Where have you been performing healing instead of practicing it?

3. What memory have you been suppressing that keeps leaking into December?

4. What might God be whispering instead of shouting in this season?

5. What does thriving, not just coping, look like for you?

MY NOTES: