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**Faith and Clutter: A Christian Perspective to Understand, Treat, and Prevent Hoarding
Disorder**

Mary Katherine Flage

Faith and Clutter: A Christian Perspective to Understand, Treat, and Prevent Hoarding Disorder

In the realm of psychological disorders, Hoarding Disorder is markedly misunderstood and complex. By examining Hoarding Disorder through the combined perspectives of contemporary psychology and the Christian worldview, this essay aspires to uncover the roots of the disorder, identify effective treatment strategies aligning with biblical principles, and explore preventive measures that can be adopted based on Christian theology. This exploration includes an analysis of Hoarding Disorder based on *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* criteria, current research on its symptoms, causes, and treatment options, and a discussion from a biblical perspective, utilizing both Scripture and contemporary theological scholarship. Through this integrative approach, this paper seeks to offer a comprehensive understanding of Hoarding Disorder, highlighting the potential for the Christian faith and psychology to work together to offer hope and healing to those affected.

Individuals with the obsessive-compulsive-related disorder, hoarding disorder, listed as Code F42, in the *DSM-5-TR*, display an intense difficulty marked by severe distress with discarding items unrelated to their tangible value, often feeling compelled to save things due to a perceived value, resulting in excessive accumulation which clinically impairs daily functioning (5th ed.; text rev.; American Psychiatric Association, 2022, p. 247). Such an accumulation of items impedes living spaces in the form of clutter, often causing living areas to be unavailable to be used as intended since there is no other available space for the accumulated items to reside. If an individual does not display this level of clutter and congestion in living areas, it is simply due to the mediation of third parties. The hoarding behavior displayed is unrelated to any prior medical conditions or another associated developmental or cognitive disorder. Hoarding disorder causes significant detriment to the individual's functioning in social, occupational, and other areas of critical functioning. This can even cause a lack of safety for the individual and others around them, often putting severe strain on family relationships (American Psychiatric Association, 2022, p. 250). Hoarding disorder is often characterized by excessive acquisition, with the most frequent form being buying items excessively, followed by acquiring free items, and there may be significant distress in the individual if they are unable to acquire more (American Psychiatric Association, 2022, p. 248). Often, this is a symptom that appears later in the treatment process since an

individual with the disorder may deny buying things in excess.

It is important to note that there must be a persistent, long-standing difficulty, with discarding items in those with hoarding disorder as opposed to short-term circumstances where an individual might have excessive clutter. The distress caused can be due to perceived value, such as regarding utility, aesthetics, or strong sentimental attachment, and individuals may feel responsible for their belongings and avoid being wasteful. Common associated features include indecisiveness, perfectionism, avoidance, procrastination, difficulty planning and organizing tasks, and distractibility (American Psychiatric Association, 2022, p. 249). Hoarding behaviors tend to arise in early life and continue to plague individuals through adulthood and later life, with symptoms often first emerging during adolescence, interfering with functioning by mid-20s, and causing substantial clinical impairment by mid-30s.

Factors appearing to influence hoarding disorder development include a temperamental feature of indecisiveness within the individual and immediate family, stressful and traumatic life events preceding onset or amplifying symptoms, and genetic factors since hoarding is seen to be a familial trait. Additionally, most individuals with hoarding disorder display comorbidity of a mood or anxiety disorder, commonly being major depressive disorder, social anxiety disorder, and generalized anxiety disorder (American Psychiatric Association, 2022, p. 251).

When integrating Biblical and theological principles from current scholarly thought, it is important to take a broader view at the underlying themes presented in hoarding disorder, particularly themes of fear and stewardship, to then seek a Biblical response in analysis and treatment of behavior in individuals with hoarding disorder. Recognizing the positive aspects of the disorder can allow individuals to feel more confident in their desire to seek help in regaining control of their lives. A mitigating approach could be to positively reframe the behavior, resulting in a more helpful outcome as opposed to detrimental impact on daily functioning. Take clutter—turning a pile of sentimental papers into a memory collage would help individuals manage their hoarding tendencies instead of forcing them to go against their natural inclinations, causing intense distress. This allows for a piece that could bless others instead of items that take up needless space without purpose. However, there is a fine line to walk with this justification since it can be easy to rationalize inappropriate behavior and excessive saving for a project that might ‘someday’ be useful. Thus, a contradictory element of

hoarding disorder that bears addressing is that of the future-looking characteristic in the act of hoarding.

Scripture informs that tomorrow is not promised; thus, the act of extreme preparation for the unknown can be characteristic of a lack of trust in the Lord's plan, neglecting the present (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2016, James 4:13-15). A Biblical example that comes to mind is that in Exodus 16 when the Israelites wander in the desert. The Lord's provision of manna from Heaven is given alongside strict instruction not to save any leftovers as a tangible representation of a trust in God to provide (Exodus 16:19). The Israelites did not listen, however, and the saved bread began to stink and grow maggots (Exodus 16:20). As believers, it is critical to trust the Lord's provision for material needs (Uwaegbute, 2022, p. 139). While this act of letting go and trusting can be incredibly uncomfortable, it is critical in the context of hoarding, to gain freedom in the hope that comes from trusting the Giver and Sustainer of life, the promise-keeper, and ever-present help in times of struggle.

The twelfth chapter of the gospel of Luke provides critical insight to the characteristics of Hoarding Disorder. First, Luke references Jesus words spoken in The Parable of the Rich Fool, instructing, “one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions” (Luke 12:15). This verse directly speaks on Hoarding Disorder, illuminating the frivolity of excess possessions. The aim of the believer must be to prioritize the spiritual well-being over material things (Odeleye, 2023, p. 3). To the rich man who decides to store up all his grain and goods, the Lord says, “Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?” (Luke 12:20). Thus, there is an emphasis on matters of the soul since, regardless of their utility, the things the rich man stored were deemed useless in the grander picture of eternity. Luke writes how believers must not lay away treasures for themselves, instead being “rich toward God” (Luke 12:21). Scripture addresses this concept beautifully, providing a potential way to reframe compulsive hoarding in a metaphysical sense, “they are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life” (1 Tim. 6:18-19). Rather than excessively accumulating material possessions with perceived value, there is true value in storing up treasures in Heaven by doing the work the Lord instructs. When anxiety—proven a high comorbidity of hoarding disorder—is the root of the issue, with the individual fearing the loss of material possessions, they can find comfort in Jesus's articulation of the promise of God in

Luke 12 (Uwaegbute, 2022, p. 138). Jesus tells His disciples to “not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on” (Luke 12:22). Just as God feeds the ravens and clothes the lilies of the field, neither toiling nor storing possessions, He promises to provide for His children, and individuals with Hoarding Disorder can learn to rest in this truth. This part of scripture sums it up best:

“Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” (Luke 12:32-34)

From a Biblical perspective, the individual struggling with hoarding must work to keep their treasure and their heart on things above.

Another key mitigating factor in hoarding behavior that alleviates the fear of losing sentimentality is the person of the Holy Spirit in Spirit-filled Christ-Followers. He has the power to bring forward any thought or memory one might need to recall for comfort, safety, or practicality. It is incredibly comforting to relax in the arms of a loving King who promises to provide all His children need according to His purpose. Surrendering is one of the hardest, yet most beautiful things a Believer can learn to do. It is an ongoing process that comes through Sanctification and is not yet complete. Additionally, a Biblically framed view of King Jesus recognizes the fears of improper stewardship as legalistic, contrary to the character and nature of the Savior, who reigns in love and mercy. Hoarding quickly becomes a distraction in an egregious attempt to be like God, gaining personal control in a small area of life, separate from true faith in Christ.

Conclusion

This paper has illuminated the complex nature of hoarding disorder with a dual-lens approach of contemporary psychology and a Christian worldview, offering a holistic picture encompassing diagnosis, treatment, and prevention. By integrating the DSM-5-TR criteria with biblical truth, faith and psychology can collaborate to provide meaningful support and healing for those struggling with hoarding disorder. The Christian perspective, particularly the emphasis on trust in God’s provision and the stewardship of possessions, presents a compelling framework for addressing the spiritual and emotional aspects of hoarding. This approach not only aims to practically manage the disorder but also nurtures the soul, guiding individuals towards a life

that values spiritual richness over material accumulation. Through such an integrated approach, there is hope for those affected by hoarding disorder to find freedom and fulfillment beyond their possessions, rooted in faith and supported by psychological insights.

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