

# Workshop Session 3

## Identity in Christ and Counselling Ministry



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# Doubting our Identity? Scrupulosity and Union with Christ

## 1 – Understanding Scrupulosity

# Life example



# The Experience of Scrupulosity

*Nobody warned me how anxiety and fear can take the thing you care about most – your faith – and turn it against you*

Alan Noble - *Living with Religious Scrupulosity or Moral OCD*, Plough



# The Experience of Scrupulosity

- 'a small sharp stone'
- 'Intrusive (spontaneous, unbidden, unwanted) and obsessive (persistent, recurring) thoughts and doubts about moral-spiritual issues,
- which produce distressing levels of anxiety
- and the quest to rid oneself of that anxiety, usually by one or more of the following: performing compulsive behaviors, engaging in mental rituals, or by avoiding triggering situations.' [Mike Emlet]

# The Experience of Scrupulosity

- Besieging fears and doubts
- Overwhelming distress
- Drivenness to find relief

# Fears and doubts

- We fear the danger of condemnation
- We doubt that we are in a right standing with God
  - Fears of blasphemy/hell/being possessed/death
  - Doubts: am I saved? Have I enough faith? Have I repented enough? Am I pure enough?

# Discuss

- *Where do we see these features with Max?*

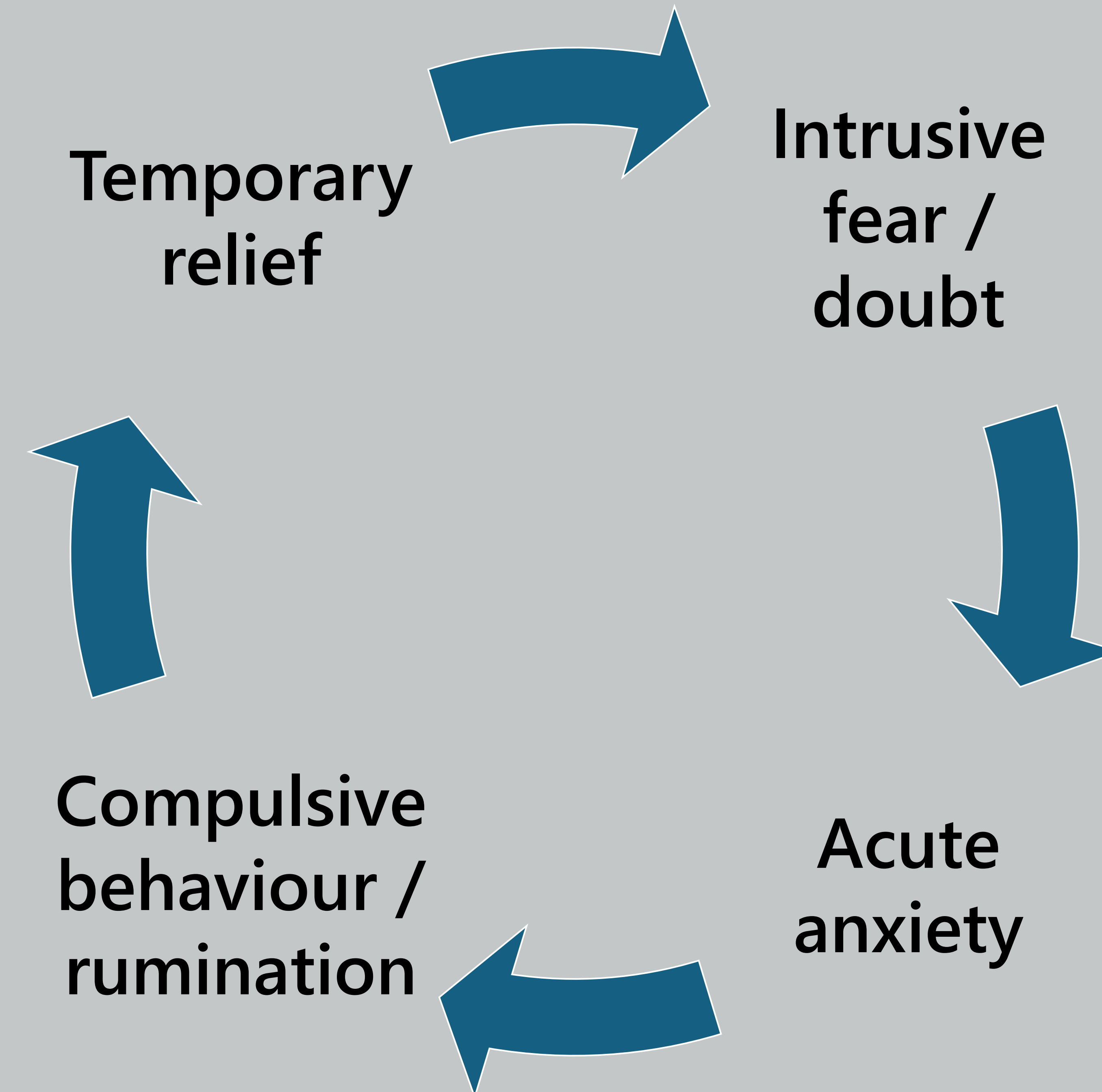
# Drivenness to find relief

- A desire for relief and refuge that compels, coerces and constrains through:
  - Behaviours: e.g. excessive confession/seeking reassurance/checking scripture/good works/avoidance
  - Mental Ruminations: e.g. arguing, controlling, avoiding, reassuring, reasoning with or neutralizing

# Discuss

- *Where do we see these features with Max?*

# The dynamic of scrupulosity



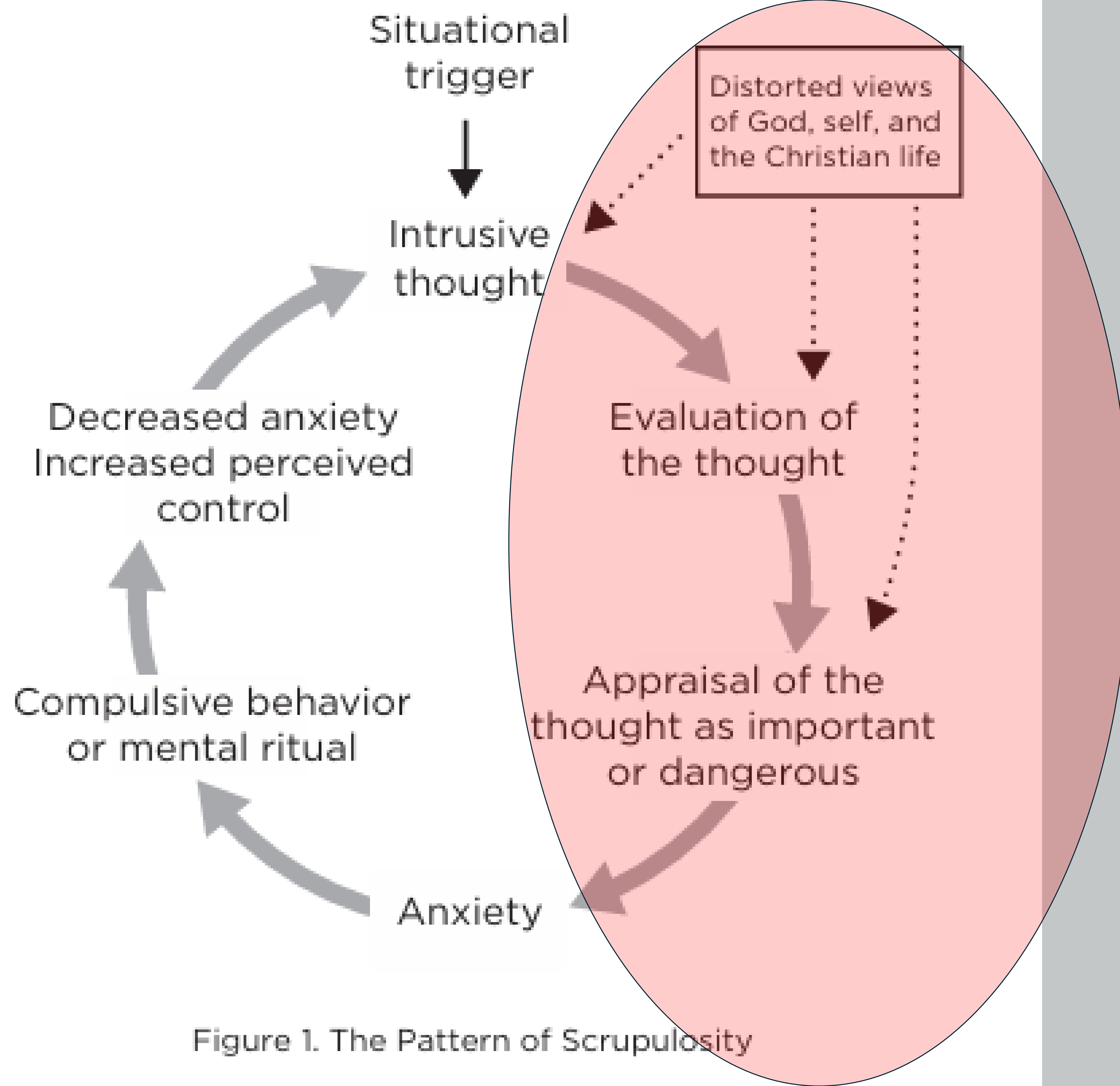
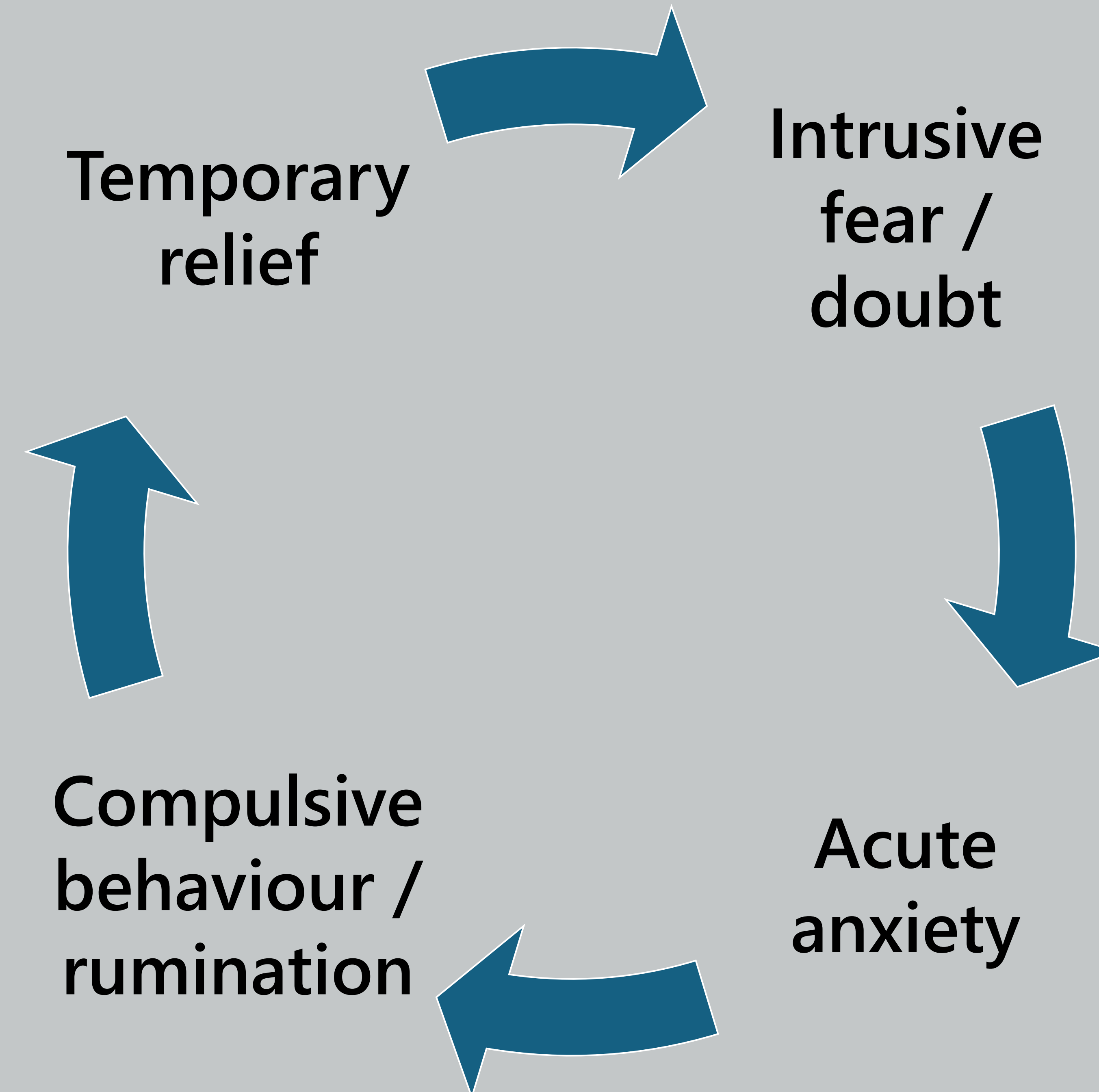


Figure 1. The Pattern of Scrupulosity

# Locating scrupulosity in the Bible?

- Psalm 88
  - v3 “overwhelmed with troubles”
  - V15 “I have borne your terrors and am in despair.”
- Psalm 13
  - V13 “how long must I wrestle with my thoughts”
- Psalm 32
  - Vv3-4, then “You are my hiding place; you will protect me”
  - *In scrupulosity, confession/reassurance-seeking etc itself becomes a futile refuge*

# The dynamic of scrupulosity



# Discussion and questions

Is this dynamic familiar as you have helped others?

What questions do you have about this model of understanding scrupulosity?

# *Principles for helping (1)*

## Detecting the struggle

- Being aware of how it may present
- Being attuned to the character of the struggle

# *Principles for helping (2)*

## Developing a relationship

- Bearing a burden constructively
- Considering the end-point early

# *Principles for helping (3)*

## Distinguishing fear and desire

- An essential distinction
- A disputed distinction
- A ministry distinction

# *Principles for helping (3)*

## Distinguishing fear and desire

- An essential distinction
- A disputed distinction
- A ministry distinction

# Distinguishing fear and desire

## #1 Intrusions are irrelevant

- 'the flotsam and jetsam of the soul'
- So, ignore your thoughts

# Distinguishing fear and desire

## #2 Intrusions are desires of the flesh

- 'First actings' of sin? James 1:13-15
- 'temptation that arises from one's deceitful desires'
- So replace your thoughts, Phil 4:8

# Distinguishing fear and desire

## #3 Intrusions are besieging fears

- Reflecting what you value (fear) most
- Fear is prominent
- The 'works' reflect fear not the flesh
- So, ministry addresses fear driving the thoughts

# *Principles for helping (3)*

## Distinguishing fear and desire

- An essential distinction
- A disputed distinction
- A ministry distinction

# Distinguishing fear and desire a ministry distinction

- Attune to the dominant struggle [fear > desire]
- *Scripture speaks differently to ruling fears and ruling desires*

# Discussion

Reflect on the fear – desire distinction

Do you agree? What questions do you have?  
What further ministry implications are there?