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# THOUGHT STOPPING

TECHNIQUES TO RECALL TRUTH & CALM YOUR MIND

It happens more often than I'd like to admit. I let them run wild.

My thoughts: like a row of televisions I can't turn off. The rushings of crows above the cathedral, the perpetual skitter of dead leaves over cobblestones in the alley behind my home.

More often than naught, the darkest ones are less turbulent but even further distorted: stealthy, hidden amidst and tucked behind one another, so their falsehood is concealed, and I am swindled into exchanging lies for truth.

They are dark times, when my shield is down, and I permit my thoughts to choose me. Like a carefully assembled militia, my wayward conclusions rally to wage war against my soul. And now and again, I willingly allow the massacre to ensue.

The thing is, we were never meant to let the father of lies—the one behind our dark thoughts—call the shots. We were never meant to live burdened with anxiety or worry about the faithfulness of friends, why we keep getting sick, how our pants are fitting, if we're safe, or if people think we're beautiful.

We were not meant to constantly wonder if everything will be okay, and we were certainly not fashioned to agonize over if we're *enough*.

Romans 12:2 says, "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."

Dr. Caroline Leaf, a communication pathologist specializing in neuropsychology, says that the most

powerful things, after God, are our phenomenal minds. Thoughts impact our soul, spirit, and body. They translate into physical, emotional, and spiritual states, which impact all our actions and, in the end, our quality of life. The Lord knew our powerful brains would be under siege the minute Eve plucked the fruit from the branch, but our fierce and mighty King also knew that His ways were more powerful, and He left much to equip us and assist in the "renewing of our minds."

We know that anxiety, depression, and panic can be monstrous—this article isn't meant to downplay the ongoing battle these savage beasts wage. A five-step process can't fix everything, and our God has revealed much truth and knowledge, as well as wise counsel and medicine, to help equip our war. May these pointers simply be powerful weapons of truth, armor to cover our delicate hearts, and gems of wisdom to hold close when the thoughts pummel and storm.

## POST TRUTH.

When you're having trouble distancing yourself from anxiety-driven thoughts, it helps to identify the lie you're believing. What is the base—the very root—of the thing you're putting your confidence in? Sometimes it's easy to wield fear as our weapon because we believe the lie that it will protect us or help us control a situation. This is never true.

Once you pinpoint the lie that hovers near, research some verses from the Bible that speak truth. Write them on notecards, paint them on a canvas, make them your phone background—post truth wherever you'll see it often to help you battle deception. Remember the armor of God:

*“For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” Hebrews 4:12*

*“Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” Ephesians 6:17*

#### IDENTIFY YOUR TRIGGERS.

While there are some triggers you simply can't avoid, there are plenty that you can identify and do your best to give a wide berth. Do you find yourself slipping into destructive thought patterns when you're home alone for long periods of time? Is there an unhealthy friendship you need to distance yourself from? Sometimes it's as simple as hunger, exhaustion, or bodily discomfort. Seek a resolution to fight these triggers, and create a self-care plan beforehand. *When I feel anxious, and I know I haven't eaten for a while, I can go to the kitchen and eat this healthy snack, which will refresh my body and mind.*

It's okay, though, if your plan doesn't work the first time. Sometimes you attempt a plan, but it just isn't practical. Keep adjusting and molding your resolution until you have something that works well for you.

#### ACTIVELY DIRECT YOUR THOUGHTS.

*Philippians 4:8 says, “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.”*

As a human, you are free to make choices that focus your attention in certain directions. When negative thinking descends, get out a journal and start compiling those heaps of thoughts onto paper. Another option is to go for a walk with a friend or family member or meet for coffee, and talk out what you're feeling. If you can't connect with someone in person, send a text—that's okay too. The goal is to reach out in whatever way you can manage. Talk with someone you trust about the lies you struggle with before they crop up. When they do hit, that trusted ally can help redirect you back to the truth.

#### GET YOUR BOX OUT.

*Physical box:* Keep a box of things you know will fit your specific needs. If you struggle with hyperactive, anxious thoughts, include some paper full of Scriptural truth, some calming music, a coloring book, a soft blanket,

or some essential oils. If your thoughts often turn dark and depressing, add things that will lift your spirits and remind you of joy—a funny book, verses touting hope, a reminder to call a friend, a bright citrus fruit, an amusing movie, or an encouraging note from a friend.

*Mental box:* A friend of mine once told me that her counselor recommended she picture a mental box when her “tornado thoughts” started to spin. When the unwanted rumination and out-of-control emotions start to crop up, she recommended getting out the mental box, shutting her thoughts inside, closing the lid, and locking it with a key. Only she and God have access to that key.

This isn't a tactic to avoid dealing with anxious thoughts—it's a practice that simply allows you to come back and deal with them when you are ready. You don't leave the problems in that space forever, but they also aren't allowed to run your life.

#### MOVE.

In the moment, if you sense that you're bordering on extreme anxiety or a panic attack, start moving. Keep your body busy, and get both sides of your brain in motion—doing this can help you calm down and pull you from that mental state. Take a walk, or if you're somewhere you can't leave, pat your legs or cross your arms over your chest and pat your arms—first left, then right—alternating your hands in a slow, steady pattern, activating both sides of your brain, until your mind settles.

#### YOU'RE NOT ALONE.

Remember, no matter what you're fighting or to whatever degree, you're never alone. Whatever battle you're in—whether you think it's real or not—you were never meant to walk this path by yourself. Engage your community, or see a counselor. Counselors are thought-stopping experts, and they'll be able to help you in your specific area and with the specific lies you're dealing with.

Stay the course, friend, and cling to truth. Take up your sword, link arms with other women who are fighting this fight, and rally courage in seeking help. You brave soul—let's muster our grit and stand firm against the lies hurled our direction. How dare they cross us? We have the power and love of the eternal King on our side—a God who reigns omnipotent, who will protect us, and has equipped us with all-powerful truth and armor to fight these battles. Swords up, ladies. We will not stop pursuing peace.

