

Don't Let Your Thoughts Limit You!

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It's Getting Better All The Time!

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**Scriptures, unless otherwise noted, are taken from the
King James Version of the Bible.**

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GREETINGS

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the . . .earth.

Genesis 1:27-28

Despite negative past experiences, challenges and thoughts that make you think you will never be able to succeed—don't give up. God created you with a wonderful purpose in mind. So continue to hope in God and His thoughts toward you.

Question:

Why did God give man dominion over the earth?

Answer:

To bring Him glory.

Meditation Scriptures

Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created. Revelation 4:11

Even every one that is called by my name: for I have created him for my glory, I have formed him; yea, I have made him.

Isaiah 43:7

For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.

1 Corinthians 6:20

THE IMPORTANCE OF YOUR THOUGHTS

Your thoughts, behaviors and feelings are connected. What you think about yourself will determine how you will or will not respond to events in your life. If you think you are incapable or inferior, then you will feel and act as if you are incapable or inferior. Similarly, if you believe you can do all things through Jesus Christ, then you will feel and behave as if you can do all things through Jesus Christ. Defeated or victorious, we are what we think.

If we are to fulfill the plan of God for our lives every thought that we have must be based upon and balanced with the Word of God. Thoughts that are balanced with the Word of God will trigger feelings and behaviors that draw us closer to Jesus Christ. Thoughts like “I know God is with me” and “all things will work together for my good” can lead to feelings of peace and encourage us to move forward in the plan of God for our lives. Unfortunately, if we do not allow The Word of God to control our thoughts we will not be able to fulfill the destiny that God has for us.

So what impact are your thoughts currently having on your life? Are your thoughts drawing you closer to Jesus Christ or further away? If you need to, take a minute and write your thoughts down on paper. Now look at them. What types of thoughts are you having on a daily basis? If it were possible to carry a tape recorder around with you and record your thoughts for a week, what types of thoughts would be recorded on your tape recorder? Would they include thoughts like “I can do all things with the help of the Lord Jesus Christ,” or would they include thoughts such as “I am so stupid,” “I can’t do that,” “they don’t like me” or “it’s not going to work out”? Listen, if we are meditating on negative thoughts all the time, then is there any wonder we feel hopeless and inadequate? Yes, it may be true you made a mistake or that some things in your life did not work out the way you planned. But do not ever let what did not happen or the mistakes you made in your past to keep you from believing in the possibility of what could happen in your future.

Any thought, feeling or situation we allow to draw us away from God and His Word will be detrimental to our ability to fulfill the call of God on our lives. If God is saying that we can and we are saying that we can’t based on our view of ourself and our circumstances then we have a problem. When you allow your weaknesses to prevent you from doing what God has called you to do, then you are rejecting the call of God for your life—without even knowing it. You are in essence saying you know more than the God who called you. How can a created being know more than the creator?

But please understand that when God calls you to do something He is already acquainted with your weakness. So it may be true that you made a mistake, that you don’t have a lot of money or that you are not as smart as someone else. But because of Jesus Christ your weakness or insufficiencies do not have to control the plan He has for your life. In fact, 1 Corinthians 1:27 lets us know that **“God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise.”**

Under the influence of a negative thought we can become so focused on our problems that we begin to say and think thoughts that are contrary to the vision of God for our lives. Those negative thoughts can limit our lives and control our behaviors to such an extent that we are unable to focus on the God-given possibilities that exist within our future. Listen—there is nothing wrong with having or expressing feelings. Feelings are normal, but if our negative feelings and thoughts are not channeled properly they can lead to spiritual and in some cases physical destruction. Just because we think or feel something does not mean things in our lives

are really the way we think or feel. No, I am not saying that what you are thinking or feeling is not true. But sometimes when we are depressed or in the middle of a crisis, for example, we can become so focused on our problems that we distort or overemphasize the impact our problems have on our lives.

Yes, it may be true you have a problem or made a mistake, but God has designed a plan to help you overcome and/or thrive in the midst of that problem. But when you are engaging in thought patterns that focus only on your weakness or problems, it is hard to believe that the negative circumstances in your life will change and that you can fulfill the call of God on your life. So don't give up or give into your negative thoughts or feelings, seek God for a plan. We cannot afford to allow thoughts that are based on our finite view of a situation to dominate us. The Word of God must be both an anchor and mirror for our thoughts and feelings.

THE WORD OF GOD

You must meditate on the Word of God and allow it to transform your thoughts, feelings and behaviors into what is written. When you meditate on the Word of God your thoughts will begin to reflect the confidence of God and not the instability of the world around you. Remember—the Scriptures through the Holy Spirit are designed to lead us and guide us into all truth, but they can't do that if we don't apply them to our lives. You are going to think something anyway, so why not infuse your thoughts with the strength that is found in the Word of God (Howard, 2000).

Let the Word of God stabilize your thinking and use it to challenge your negative thoughts. Remember, our thoughts feelings and behaviors are connected. Negativity in one area will lead to negativity in the others. So do not let your mind simply wander or engage in thoughts that do not build you up. Challenge or contradict negative thoughts with truth from the Word of God.

For example, have you ever felt as if no one loved you or that no one cared? Well, that feeling and accompanying thought is untrue. In fact, the Word of God lets us know that God loved you so much that He sent His son to die for you. And neither is it true that “everyone hates you” or that things in your life “will never work out.” Now it may be true that some things in your life have not worked out the way you hoped or that some people do not like you. But “some” is a far cry from “everyone.” Unfortunately, when you are engaging in negative thinking it is easy to focus only on the negatives in your life. That is why you must use the Word of God in your thoughts. If you do not challenge your negative thoughts with the Word of God, your faith in God and in the abilities He has placed in you will become compromised. It will be hard for you to believe that God has a wonderful purpose for your life and to excel in the plans that He has for you.

Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. Philippians 4:8

Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ; 2 Corinthians 10:5

But while the Word of God will stabilize and bring feelings of hope to your mind, the Word of God is not a “positive thinking book” in the sense that it merely focuses on the positives and overlooks the negatives. The Word of God does not ignore the problems in our lives nor does it encourage a “pie in the sky” mentality. Issues such as rape, incest, justice, discipline, abuse, slavery, and poverty, are discussed along with love, hope, grace and mercy. The Word of God is not afraid to confront both the positives and negatives in our lives and we should not be either. Yes, it may be true you have a problem you can't solve, but it is also true you serve a God who is able to provide you with a strategy to overcome your negative situation. But when you try to pretend that you do not have a problem or try to cover up how you are really feeling by quoting scriptures and ignoring your problems you are not being honest and you are operating in something other than faith. When you are not being honest in your thinking you are opening your mind up to negative emotions such as fear and worry.

Yes, we need the Word of God, and meditating on the Scriptures should be a daily part of our lives; but when we attempt to use the Scriptures as a pretense for not dealing with issues we are not really resting in the Word of God. When confronted with a problem, it's all right to acknowledge it. Acknowledging the problem

does not mean we do not trust God or that we are not operating in faith, on the contrary acknowledging the problem is a testament to our faith.

But when we do not bring our feelings to God or acknowledge the fact that there is a problem we can waste time and resources trying to devise ideas or strategies that are contrary to the plan of God for our lives. When we keep our feelings bottled up inside of us we are not being honest. Now, I think it is important that we confess words of faith and that we stand on the scriptures, but after we have finished standing on the scriptures and confessing we must set aside some time to go before God and tell him how we are really feeling. It is ok to go to our Father and to ask him to help us to believe, it is ok to go to our father and confess that we do not have enough strength for the situation that we are facing. No matter what happens in our lives, even if it is a situation we caused, we can go to God and honestly tell Him how we are feeling. God has a way of escape for every situation we will face so we do not have to fear.

In contrast to fear, faith is not afraid to acknowledge a problem because it trusts the problem solver. When we are operating in faith we are not afraid to honestly confess our feelings to God, even if those feelings include feelings of fear. When we are operating in faith we understand the power of Jesus Christ is able to bring about a miracle and deliverance in our lives. Faith keeps us focused on our deliverance while fear prevents us from moving forward. You may say, "I have been praying about this same situation for a long time, and nothing is changing." But that is not true. Your spirit is changing, either for the good or for the bad. For example, do you become permanently angry, disgruntled or unhappy with God when He does not answer your prayers in the way you want Him to? Becoming angry and disappointed in response to an unanswered prayer or situation is not abnormal. But has your anger, unhappiness or disappointment become a permanent part of your spirit? Do you still believe God the way you once did? How is your faith level?

Unfortunately, some of us allow negative thoughts and feelings that have their root in a spirit of pride and a sense of entitlement to hold us back. Pride will make us think and feel that we "should" or "ought to" have what we want and that God does not know what He is doing. Pride will make us feel that we are getting the short end of the stick and keep us focused on our needs. But it takes a sense of humility to let go of what we want and trust God to answer our prayers in the way He deems necessary.

When we are operating in faith we understand that every response from God is always subject to His Word, His will and His timing. When we operate in faith we refuse to let feelings of fear keep us from moving forward in God.

As people of God, we must learn to accept the sovereign plan of God in our lives even when it is not the plan we desire. God has the final say in our lives. When we reach the point where we believe He is with us, then we can accept His will and trust that He has our best interest at heart. But acceptance is not the same thing as giving up or doubting the possibility that a miracle can happen. On the contrary, acceptance means trusting the sovereign plan of God to such an extent that we rest in Him no matter what happens. When we accept that God is in control of our lives our focus is transformed from what we are praying about to the God who can answer our prayers. Acceptance brings peace into our lives, and it places us in a position where we can take control over that problem or situation that is trying to control us. When we accept what God is doing in our lives we can trust Him and live beyond our problems. And when we can trust the power of Jesus Christ in our lives we do not have to be uneasy about the outcome. We do not have to go through life feeling defeated or hopeless.

Having feelings are a normal part of life. If allowed to influence us in a positive way they can push us into making some beneficial life changes. Our thoughts, feelings and behaviors feed off each other, and together they influence how we will respond or not respond to situations that confront us. Negative feelings if allowed to control our thoughts can cause us to act as if things in our lives will never change and to give up on our dreams and desires. Negative thoughts and feelings can be triggered by a variety of factors that include long-term illnesses, abuse, past memories and unfair situations. Over the next several pages we will be exploring several of those feelings in more detail.

Hopelessness

Hopeless feelings can cause you to act as if life has no meaning and to give up on your dreams. Unfortunately, if you think your life is hopeless then that is how you will behave and feel. But don't let feelings of hopelessness have the final say so. Whenever you find yourself engaging in hopeless thoughts, stop and ask yourself what you are feeling hopeless about and what you can do about it. The power of life and death is in your mouth, and God has given you power over every enemy to include negative thoughts. Enemies like low self-esteem, doubt and hopelessness are no match for the Word of God.

So no matter how you may feel at this moment, never give up. Always remember that though life might seem hopeless right now, it does not have to stay that way. Yes, you do have something to add to the world in which you live, so challenge your feelings of hopelessness with the Word of God. When feelings of hopelessness are not challenged with the truth that is found in the Word of God, it will weaken your faith and cause you to give up completely on life. When we allow feelings of hopelessness to control our lives we are, without even realizing it, opening the door for a whole host of other negative emotions.

Negative emotions, like self-pity, apathy, rage and false beliefs concerning our self-worth and abilities, can join with feelings of hopelessness to destroy us both spiritually and physically. Physically, feelings of hopelessness can lead to feelings of worthlessness, and feelings of worthlessness can ultimately lead to suicide and other self-destructive thoughts and behaviors. Likewise, from a spiritual perspective, feelings of hopelessness can lead to the erosion of our trust in God and to the ultimate destruction of our faith. But don't let this happen to you. Constantly remind yourself that God planned your birth and has a purpose for your being here. So continue to hope and trust in God until you see your life in the way in which He sees it. Place your hope in Him and watch Him lead and guide you into a life full of peace and joy.

In closing, I understand some people reading this booklet may be living with the symptoms of an illness that affects your ability to think clearly. It may not be as easy for you as it is for someone else to focus your thoughts on the Word of God. Well, if this describes you please know God is not going to hold you accountable for what you are unable to do. All He asks is that you rely on Him and trust Him to make up the difference in any area of your life where you are having difficulties. John 14:26 lets us know the Spirit of God will “**teach you all things.**” All things means just that. God will teach you how to meditate on His Word and serve Him in the midst of your symptoms. With the aid of His Spirit you can walk in the Word of God without condemnation, knowing He is mindful of your challenges. Listen—all things were created for the pleasure of God including you, limitations and all. So don't let your limitations keep you from fulfilling the destiny God has for your life. Determine to use whatever gifts God has given you to the fullest. God has given you a gift so take your focus off your problems and place them on Jesus Christ. Don't give into hopelessness.

Meditation Scriptures

**Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart,
all ye that hope in the Lord.**

Psalms 31:24

Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is. Jeremiah 17:7

Questions

1. What are some of the thoughts, events or situations that trigger feelings of hopelessness for you?
2. What strategies can you use to cope with these thoughts, events and/or situations?
3. What does the Bible have to say about hope?

Rejection

If you have ever been rejected in your life it is understandable that you may be a little hesitant about placing yourself in situations in which you could potentially be rejected again. But do not allow a fear of rejection to control you. When you allow a fear of rejection to control your life, you limit your potential and your ability to move forward in the purpose and plans God has for you. Yes, we may be rejected sometimes, but we must remember that even when man rejects us Jesus Christ is always in our corner.

Where does a fear of rejection come from? An individual can develop a fear of rejection from a variety of sources to include: a history of abandonment, abuse, peer rejection, family issues and other negative situations. For example, some parents for various reasons may have one favorite child and one not-so-favorite child in the family. The not-so-favorite child grows up feeling rejected by his or her parents, and because of this he or she may go through life feeling as if there is something wrong with him or her. Then there are situations in which a child has grown up without the presence of a loving parent or a stable home and consequently has grown up feeling rejected or different from everyone else. But, regardless of the source, feelings of rejection, like other negative emotions, can trigger or open the door for a host of other unhelpful thoughts and behaviors. For instance feelings of guilt, a poor self-image, a tendency to degrade oneself, anger, hatred, self-pity, distrust and a lack of self-confidence are just some of the negative feelings that can grow out of the seed of rejection.

Whenever we are feeling vulnerable or anticipate being rejected, we erect emotional defenses as a way to protect ourselves from the pain. Feelings like denial, avoidance, anger and hostility are just a few of those man-made emotional defenses we use to control the pain of rejection. Unfortunately, man-made defenses, like the fig leaves Adam and Eve used in the Garden of Eden to hide their sins, only conceal; they do not heal us. Man-made defenses or gimmicks give us the illusion of being free, but the feelings we are trying to cover up always have a way of manifesting themselves in other areas of our lives.

Covering up our feelings can cause us to go through life being on the defensive and fearful in our relationships with other people. But please know that God wants to heal you and make you completely free from the influence of your past. Because of the resurrecting power of Jesus Christ you don't have to spend the rest of your life being controlled by a fear of rejection or any other negative emotion. Jesus Christ did not rise again just so a fear of rejection or the defenses you have created to deal with your hurts can rule your present or control your future.

Living with a fear of rejection can cause you not only to shy away from people and certain circumstances but it can also keep you from embracing your future and the call God has on your life. Yes, you do have a call of God on your life and at times walking with God will require you to move out of your comfort zone and run the risk of being rejected for that call. Additionally in your walk with God, as you love and seek Him, He may choose to love you back with a word of correction or rebuke. But when we are reacting to events or situations based on our fears we could misinterpret the correction of God for rejection. You must always remember that God's words of correction are designed to heal us and draw our spirits closer to Him. So don't try to figure out God by using your past experiences as a guide; let the Word of God be your interpreter. God has designed a wonderful purpose for your life. So don't let a fear of rejection keep you from experiencing all that He has for you.

Meditation Scriptures

**I am come that they might have life,
and that they might have it more abundantly.**

John 10:10

And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves aprons.

Genesis 3:7

Questions

1. Can you identify some of the ways a fear of rejection is controlling your life?
2. Identify and meditate on three scriptures that can help you overcome feelings of rejection.
3. What does the Bible say about God and His nature? What does the Bible say about His thoughts toward you?
4. How are your past experiences affecting your relationship with the Word of God? With other people?

Fear

Are feelings of fear keeping you from living your God inspired dreams? If not put in its proper place a feeling of fear can prevent us from walking in the plan that God has for us and cause us to underestimate the ability of God in our lives. When feelings of fear control our lives we will shy away from doing anything that forces us out of our comfort zone. Do you remember the children of Israel in the thirteenth chapter of Numbers? Well, when we read this particular chapter we discover that despite the power and the purpose God had for this great nation they underestimated their ability in God and saw themselves as weak. They forgot about the power of God and allowed fear to keep them from going into the land He had promised them. Instead of adopting an attitude of “We can do all things,” they adopted a “We can’t” attitude. which was manifested in the words **“We are not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we are.”** Numbers 13-31. Instead of focusing on the power of God the children of Israel focused on their limitations and turned back from what God had for them, delaying their progress for several years. What about you? Are you focusing so much on your limitations that you are immobilized by fear unable to step out in God?

Please understand that it is one thing to experience a natural emotion such as fear. But it is another thing to let fear keep you from living the life God has for you. Uncontrolled feelings of fear can impede your emotional and spiritual mobility and cause you to be dependent and limited in your thinking, as opposed to being victorious in Jesus Christ. A spirit of fear will not only stop you from being all God wants you to be, but it can trigger the development of untrue thoughts concerning you as a person and your abilities.

For example, how did the children of God in the book of Numbers know the people in the promised land were stronger than they were? They did not’t know. Instead, the children of Israel based their negative conclusions on their perceptions of themselves and their limitations and not on the ability of God. Think about it: How do you know things will not work out for you tomorrow? How do you know that you can’t do the thing God is calling you to do? When God places an idea in your heart do you immediately focus on your limitations? Unfortunately, many of us react just as the children of Israel did in the thirteenth chapter of Numbers. We make a prediction about what will happen to us in the now based on what has happened to us in the past and on our finite view of ourselves. But please know that because of Jesus Christ we do not have to be limited by fear. As followers of Jesus Christ we can confidently move forward despite our fears because God is with us.

God said to Jeremiah, and He is saying to you, **“I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end”** (29:11). So if your view of yourself or your situation is not based on the hope that is found in the Word of God it must change. If you allow fear to stop you from doing the thing God is calling you to do, then you are walking in the ideas of your own opinion of yourself and your situation. Understand that fear causes you to focus on your weaknesses and all that could go wrong. But God is telling you to “fear not” because He is always with you. And if God is with you then all things will work together for good. So identify areas in your life where you have allowed fear to control you, and then through the Word of God develop a plan to overcome in that area.

Philippians 4:13 reminds us that as believers in Jesus Christ we **“can do all things through Christ, which strengtheneth us.”** This is a good verse to remember, especially since following God will require us to get out of our comfort zone and sometimes take many God-initiated risks. The word “risk” as we are using it here does not refer to any reckless or harmful behaviors. Instead it refers to those situations God has ordered for our lives, to strengthen our faith and to get us to move closer to the destiny He has for us. Giving into feelings of fear will prevent you from taking a risk or moving outside of the box that you or other people in your life have developed for you. If allowed to control your life a spirit of fear will keep you from

walking wholeheartedly in faith. But remember that fear is a natural emotion, and feeling a certain amount of fear and uncertainty is normal, especially when we are moving out of our comfort zone. We can't let that feeling stop us, though.

Remember: God does not want us to be a slave to our flesh or to thoughts and ideas that are contrary to His Word. If God is saying we can do something and fear is telling us we can't, then we have to ask ourselves whose report will we believe? Think about this: Abraham had to take a risk and leave his family, Esther had to take a risk in order to save a nation, and Gideon had to take a risk in order to lead his people into battle. What about you? Are you willing to take a risk for the kingdom of God, or will you allow fear to hold you back?

Now please understand that we all have areas or situations in our lives that generate fear. We all have areas in our lives in which we could use a little help, but God does not want us to run away from our fears. Instead He wants to strengthen us and make us into the person He designed us to be.

Meditation Scriptures

**For God hath not given us the spirit of fear;
but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.**

2 Timothy 1:7

The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord: and He delighteth in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down:

for the Lord upholdeth him with His hand.

Psalms 37:23

There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear:

because fear has torment.

1 John 4:18

For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end.

Jeremiah 29:11

Submit yourselves therefore to God.

Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

James 4:7

Questions

1. In what areas of your life are you allowing fear to hold you back?
2. When God tells you to do something, do you look at your limitations first or God's ability first? Why?
3. Identify some situations that generate a feeling of fear in your life. Then identify some strategies to help you cope.

Fear of Failure

No one likes to fail, but failure can help to set the stage for our greatest victory if we learn to use it to our advantage. What does this mean? Well, when we resist the urge to let a fear of failure prevent us from trying again or when we use failure as an opportunity to seek God and strategize our lives, then we have placed ourselves in a position to allow failure to make us better. For example, in Luke 22:62 we find the apostle Peter, the man who would be God's mouthpiece on the day of Pentecost, weeping bitterly after he had just denied Jesus Christ for the third time. Yet despite that event Peter did not allow his failure to stop him permanently. Instead Peter wept, he organized his emotions, repented and continued to follow Jesus Christ.

Please understand there may be many times in our lives in which we will experience failure, but because of Jesus Christ failure does not have to be the end of the matter. We must always remember that as we continue to trust God in the midst of whatever is going on in our lives things will work out for our good. But if we allow a fear of failure to keep us from trying again we may never know the full potential of Jesus Christ inside of us. Allowing a fear of failure to control our lives can cause us to hide from responsibility, run away from challenges or just give up totally. Nursing a fear of failure can cause us to spend the rest of our lives playing it safe and trying to protect ourselves from being hurt. But God never called us to play it safe. So if God is saying you can do something and your fear of failure is saying you can't, then your feelings are lying to you, and that lie must be dealt with by the Word of God. The truth is, you can do all things through Christ which strengthens you! The truth is, you are more than a conqueror! So allow the truth of the Word of God to control your thoughts and your actions. You don't have to hide or run away from your failure because He in you can handle anything you will face.

Our response to failure can also provide us with an opportunity to identify those thoughts and feelings we have about ourselves that are detrimental to our spiritual growth. Feelings of pride, self-righteousness and arrogance are just some of those feelings that can lay unchallenged in our hearts and keep us from being close to God. Let's be honest. Some of us need to experience situations in our lives that cause us to examine ourselves and make God-ordered changes. For example, before the twenty-second chapter of Luke, the apostle Peter never thought he would deny Jesus, but under pressure he did. Similarly we may look at someone who is doing something wrong and say to ourselves, "I would never do that." The reality is, however, that we don't know what we would do given the same situation. But failure has a way of bringing to the surface the pride and secret feelings resting in our hearts that if allowed to grow unchallenged would hamper us spiritually. For instance, do you give up when you fail, or do you keep going? Do you become angry and blame everyone else for your failures? Or do you seek to learn from your mistakes? Most important, when you fail at something what kind of words do you say to yourself?

Understand that it is not necessarily the failure or mistake itself that causes the most damage. Instead it is our perception of the failure and how it makes us feel and think about ourselves that can damage our lives the most. Because our perception of ourselves is manifested by the words we use we must be sensitive to the impact our words have on our lives. Listen—we can't go through life thinking negatively and verbally degrading ourselves without experiencing negative consequences to our self-esteem. For instance, when you fail at something do you automatically say things like "I am so stupid" or "I can't do anything right"? Unfortunately, if the words you use to describe yourself are negative and are not challenged by the Word of God they will keep you from living the kind of life God wants you to live. As we are reminded in Proverbs 23:7, "**For as he (a man) thinketh in his heart, so is he.**" So we must allow the Word of God, not our negative thoughts, to shape our feelings and response to failure. This does not mean we ignore problems or look at life through rose

-colored glasses. Instead we must learn to balance our emotional response to failure with the Word of God. We must learn to put failure in its proper place and resist the urge to use it as an opportunity to beat ourselves up verbally.

Matthew 12:35 lets us know that “**out of the abundance of the heart the mouth will speak,**” so if I secretly spend my time telling myself how bad a person I am, then I don’t believe I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. If I view myself as an accident waiting to happen, then I really do not believe, no matter how many times I say out of my mouth “I am fearfully and wonderfully made,” that I am in fact fearfully and wonderfully made. Listen—it is one thing to quote scriptures, but it is another thing for that scripture to become a part of your heart. If God says you can, but everything within you is saying you cannot, then there is a hindrance in your thought pattern that must be brought before Jesus Christ in prayer and eradicated with the Word of God.

Unfortunately, many people see failure as an indictment or personal mark against them, instead of as a tool that can be used to strengthen or edify them. The truth is, failure in one area may just be an indicator that change may be needed in that specific area of your life. Failure is not an indicator of your self-worth, so don’t view yourself as a failure just because you made a mistake. Do, however, look at those areas in your life where you have experienced failure and identify what role if any you played. Then, if possible, take steps to decrease your chances of experiencing failure in that same area again in the future.

For example, did you fail to get a certain job because you don’t have a GED or high school diploma? If so, you need to get one. Have you been fired from a job because you were constantly late? If so, you need to make a change. Don’t let past failures keep you down. Seek God for a plan to turn your failure into success, and when He does give you the plan don’t let a fear of failure stop you from implementing it. Now the plan God gives you may involve other people, but He never designed a person to do what only He can do. For instance, while the government and other people may all play a part in our lives, our hope can’t be in the government or in people. Your Lord wants to fellowship and commune with you about what is going on in your life. HE wants to give YOU a plan to make your marriage better. HE wants to give YOU a plan to overcome any limitations you may be facing.

It may be true you failed at something in the past, and it may be true you will fail at something in the future. But failure is not an indicator that you will never be able to succeed or be victorious. Unfortunately, some people feel they are destined for failure so they never try to succeed or even expect that things will ever work out for them in life. Sadly, people who expect failure come to view mediocre or substandard behavior as the norm and don’t demand more from themselves or from people around them. But a mind-set that expects defeat and thinks things in life will never improve is based upon a lie that is not substantiated from the Word of God. Remember God said first to the children of Israel and now to all who would believe on Him: “**I know the thoughts that I think toward you. . .thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end**” (Jeremiah 29:11).

God can do beyond whatever we can ask or think, but He just needs someone to believe Him. So draw closer to Jesus Christ, read the Word of God and develop a relationship with Him. The deeper your relationship is with Him, the more you will come to know Him and His love for you. Remember that with a God-ordered plan failure is just a stepping-stone to greatness. So don’t let a fear of failure limit your life and cause you to think small or to play it safe ever again. Amen!!

Meditation Scriptures

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose.

Romans 8:28

Commit thy works unto the Lord, and thy thoughts shall be established. Proverbs 16:3

For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he.

Proverbs 23:7

**There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear:
because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.**

1 John 4:18

**Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts:
and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom.**

Psalm 51:6

Questions

1. When you fail at something what are the first thoughts that come to your mind?
2. How is a fear of failure preventing you from living a full and rewarding life?
3. Identify and meditate on some scriptures that can help you overcome fear.

Past Hurts

Allowing emotions associated with our past hurts to influence our lives negatively can lead to a variety of unhealthy behaviors and thoughts that can prevent us from trusting the Word of God in the now. Living in the shadows of past hurts can cause us to react in the present to something that happened in the past. James 1:8 states that “**a double minded man is unstable in all his ways,**” and Matthew 9:17 warns us against “**putting new wine in old wine skins.**” When we try to cover up our hurts as opposed to allowing God to heal them we are not free. When we try to cover up our feelings and hurts using man-made defenses we are in a sense attempting to place new wine in old wine skins. But God does not want us to go through life nursing old hurts or reacting in the present to something that happened in the past. While man-made defenses may seem to protect us from the negative feelings we are trying to avoid, they often come with unexpected consequences.

For instance, in order to shield ourselves from the hurts of our past we may find ourselves withdrawing from people, masking our feelings with alcohol, getting into abusive relationships and/or allowing feelings of rejection to control our lives. Additionally, un-healed past hurts can cause us to be oversensitive in certain areas of our lives and to misinterpret or react inappropriately to things and people around us. When we internalize the hurts of the past we can spend the rest of our lives allowing past hurts to control our present and cause us to reject people who want to love us.

For example, if a person reminded you of someone who hurt you many years ago and that person said something you did not like, are you able to separate him or her from the one who hurt you in the past? If not, you run the risk of not being able to develop the type of relationship Jesus Christ would desire for you to have with that person. Do you go through life feeling as if people are always out to get you? Are you able to have friends or people around you who disagree with you, without feeling as if you have to prove your point or be right? Do you find yourself always over reacting or snapping at people for no reason? Please understand we can't go through life being negatively controlled by past hurts and expect to be greatly used by God. We can't serve God effectively if we are always thinking people are out to hurt us or are reacting in the present to something that happened in the past (Hunt, 1999). Don't let past hurts control your perceptions of the present and destroy the good things God has in store for you.

Meditation Scriptures

My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord;

neither be weary of his correction.

Proverbs 3:11

Abide in me, and I in you.

As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine;

no more can ye, except ye abide in me.

John 15:4

Questions

1. Reflect on the areas in your life in which you have been hurt. Have you asked God to heal those areas? If not, why not?
2. Identify present situations in which you have over-reacted in response to hurts from the past?
3. What behaviors have you adopted to protect yourself from being hurt?
4. Are they helpful or godly protective coping behaviors?

Criticism

Having to deal with criticism does not always mean the other person is right and we are wrong. Nor does criticism mean we are bad or somehow inferior to other people around us. Simply stated, criticism is just a difference of opinions between us and someone else. So be careful not to take criticism too personally. Unfortunately not taking criticism too personally is hard for some of us. This is especially true if we have had circumstances in our lives that make us particularly susceptible to feelings of low self-esteem or depression, for example. But the truth is, if the criticism we are receiving does not agree with the Word of God, then we do not have to agree with our critic. We can choose how we will or will not respond to criticism. Many times when we are engaging in or moving forward in the plan of God for our life we will be criticized.

For example, in Nehemiah 4:2-3 we read: **“And he spake before his brethren and the army of Samaria, and said, What do these feeble Jews? Will they fortify themselves? Will they sacrifice? Will they make an end in a day? Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish which are burned? Now Tobiah the Ammonite was by him, and he said, Even that which they build, if a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall.”**

But we can't give up or stop. We must treat our critics the same way Nehemiah treated his as was seen in **Nehemiah 6: 2-4. That Sanballat and Geshem sent unto me, saying, Come, let us meet together in some one of the villages in the plain of Ono. But they thought to do me mischief. And I sent messengers unto them, saying, I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you? Yet they sent unto me four times after this sort; and I answered them after the same manner**

When confronted with his critics Nehemiah had a choice. He could have either agreed with the criticism and quit, or he could have rejected the words of his critics and continued the work God had for him. He decided to continue the work and by doing so blessed an entire nation. Make no mistake about it, as you grow in God and take more God-inspired risks, the more vulnerable you will be to criticism. But if you can resist the urge to go on the defensive whenever you are criticized, the Word of God will strengthen you in the middle of your situation.

Understand that it may be true that Sister or Brother “So and So” does not think very much of you. But you must not allow what other people think of you to control how you think about yourself, especially if their words are not based upon the Word of God. But sometimes the reason criticism bothers us so much is because we still have unresolved internal issues we have not brought to the cross. Listen, if you are feeling inferior on the inside and think you will never amount to much, then the criticism of people is just confirming or echoing what you think about yourself. If you believe the words of your critics over the Word of God then that is an area in your life that must be challenged with the Word of God.

On the other hand, if the criticism you receive is in line with the Word of God, then you must ask God for the grace to bring your behavior in line with His Word. Now this may be difficult to do because we have a tendency to look at a situation and pass judgment on it based on how we view things. Unfortunately, our view of life may not be accurate. As such, we must always be willing to evaluate what is being said and felt inside of us by the entire Word of God (not just the scriptures we like) and make changes in our lives as needed. God wants to restore us to Himself in every area of our lives. So resist the urge to go on the defense every time someone says something to you that you do not like. Remember that God could be speaking to you through that person or situation.

Meditation Scriptures

**The fear of man bringeth a snare:
but whoso putteth his trust in the Lord shall be safe.**

Proverbs 29:25

**The heart of the prudent getteth knowledge; and the ear of the wise seeketh knowledge. Proverbs
18:15**

**A fool hath no delight in understanding,
but that his heart may discover itself. Proverbs 18:2**

I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.

Philippians 4: 13

Questions

1. When a person criticizes you, do you immediately go on the defense? Why?
2. How do you react to criticism? How can criticism draw you closer to the plan of God for your life?

Anger

Anger is a normal and mostly healthy emotion that can prompt you to make needed changes in your life or take action on a particular issue or cause. Anger is unhealthy, though, when it gets in the way of your relationships with other people, yourself or even the Lord Jesus Christ. Now the Word of God acknowledges the fact that we all may become angry at times, but some of us have a tendency either to lash out or to suppress our anger more than others. How we give vent to our anger is learned and can be influenced by various factors to include our genetics, the environment we grew up in and our culture. The good news is that we can change.

Getting angry is a choice we make based on our thinking about the event or situation that triggered the emotion. For instance, if a ninety-year-old blind person stepped on your foot you might be a little irritated at first, but you would most likely get over it quickly. Why? You might assume that because of the person's age and physical condition it was probably an accident. That assumption or thought will control your feelings and behaviors. Now let's consider the same scenario. But this time instead of a ninety-year-old blind person it is a twenty-year-old person with a bad attitude who neglected to say, "Excuse me." Your reaction toward the event might be a little different. Why? Your assumptions and thoughts about the twenty-year-old person will be different, and that difference will influence your feelings and ultimately your behavior.

Understand that we all have the ability to get angry. If we have a problem controlling our anger, however, we must seek God for the root cause and a strategy to manage it. For some people a right strategy may consist of learning how to communicate our feelings effectively or adopting behaviors that are more assertive and less aggressive. For others, talking about what is bothering us and learning how to decrease stress are two other solutions that may be helpful. But each person is different, so each of us will have to find the strategy that works best for us.

Some of us may have had experiences in our lives that demanded that we protect ourselves emotionally and sometimes even physically. Because of these experiences we have had to develop defenses, like fighting and yelling for example, in order to survive. While these defenses may have been helpful in the past they may not be appropriate now. Defenses that bring with them additional negative emotional baggage can generate problems for us and the people around us.

But learning how to control our thinking, though, may be the most important strategy any of us can develop in our attempt to manage our feelings, especially our anger.

Think about the situations that cause you to become angry. What thoughts were going through your mind at the time? Did your thoughts calm you down or feed your feelings of anger? What are the particular physical and psychological signals that indicate you are becoming angry? For example, do you find yourself becoming easily angered when you feel tired, under stress or threatened in any way? Does your heart start to beat faster? Answers to these questions can help you identify your triggers and cause you to think about how you respond to anger. But you can't get away with the excuse that "So and so made me angry." The fact is, YOU can learn to control your anger. It may not be easy, but the more you know about your triggers, thoughts and behaviors, the more control you can have over your emotions.

Angry outbursts is one problem but never expressing your feelings can be another. For instance, there are people who pride themselves on never showing their anger. But hiding or suppressing feelings of anger can be just as detrimental as uncontrolled outbursts. On the outside these people are the picture of self-control;

but in reality this control is just a front to hide feelings of unhappiness and anxiety. But God never meant for us to hide our feelings or to cover up how we are feeling with a lie or a false picture of ourselves. Suppressing our anger and always trying to project a perfect image is work. So ask God to heal you and deliver you from the mask you wear to hide behind your hurts.

Do not let your uncontrolled feelings of anger cause you to sin. Do not let your inability to control your anger keep you from having a happy life, a life void of excessive drama and relational problems. Get help.

Meditation Scriptures

**There is no fear in love;
but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment.**

He that feareth is not made perfect in love.

1 John 4:18

Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath:

Neither give place to the devil.

Ephesians 4:26

Questions

1. What situations or events trigger feelings of anger in you?
2. How do you cope with anger? What are some of your physical responses to anger?
3. How does your anger influence your life? Your family? Your walk with Jesus Christ?

Guilt

Guilt is another emotion that can either motivate us or hinder our ability to fulfill the plan of God for our lives. Guilt can either be good in that it drives us closer to Jesus Christ or bad in that it pushes us further away. A bad feeling of guilt is one that does not lead to a true change of heart and keeps us separated from the love of God. A bad sense of guilt will generate momentary sorrow, condemnation and feelings of remorse but produce no godly change (Hunt, 2000). Bad guilt will cause us to make excuses, to rehearse our faults over and over again in our thoughts, but still not come to Jesus Christ.

In comparison, guilt in which the Spirit of God convicts us will cause us to evaluate ourselves and make biblically based life changes. Godly motivated guilt will prompt us to repent from the error of our ways and commit to a new way of life according to the Word of God. This guilt will bring about a sense of sorrow, but it will also cause us to bring our behavior in line with the Word of God. Guilt that leads to godly sorrow will bring about repentance, and repentance will bring an increase in our spiritual life.

In closing, if you have committed a sin, do not allow a false sense of guilt to drive you away from the Word and the power of Jesus Christ. God is able and willing to forgive you and to cleanse you from all unrighteousness.

Meditation Scriptures

For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death. 2 Corinthians 7:10

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:9

Questions

1. Are you feeling guilty enough to seek God for a change in your life?
2. Have you asked God to come into the areas of your life that are contrary to the Word of God?
3. Are your guilty feelings causing you to draw closer to God in faith or pull away from God?

IN CLOSING

James 4:7-8 says, “**Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you.**” When you make a commitment to walk submitted to the will of God for your life, nothing will be able to separate you from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus. So don’t spend all of your time living in the past or focusing on your insufficiencies. The power of Jesus Christ can dominate any power that seeks to dominate you. Don’t let depression, negative thoughts or hopelessness keep you from fulfilling the plan of God for your life. Keep moving forward!