

How to Break Free of Despair

Written by Bill Perkins

All of us battle with discouragement. Occasionally, it can lead to despair. Getting free of toxic emotions, like discouragement and despair, begins with finding out what thought triggered the emotion. We need to follow the example of the despairing man who asked himself, "Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me?" (Psalm 42:5).

What Thought Triggered It?

Whenever you're emotionally down, ask yourself, what thought triggered your feelings. Discouragement often follows on the heels of a lie. It could be a lie about the future and your inability to overcome a problem. It could be a lie about God.

Held Captive

The author of the 42nd Psalm penned his thoughts while held captive. His enemies ridiculed his faith and mocked his God. Initially, he despaired. And then after asking himself why he was down he shifted his focus away from his circumstances to God. He told himself, "Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God."

The psalmist replaced lying thoughts with truthful ones. He urged himself to "hope" in God. The Hebrew word for "hope" means to "wait for," "believe in," or "trust in." The verb doesn't speak of an unrealistic faith that focuses on the silver lining and ignores the clouds. It refers to trusting in the personal God who is there and will deliver. The same God you and I serve. That doesn't mean God will deliver you in the way you want. But he will deliver you.

Talk With the Gatekeeper

Recent discoveries about the brain provide us with how you can change your emotions by changing your thoughts. There is a part of the brain that serves as a gate to your mind. The problem is most of us never talk with the gatekeeper and tell him what thoughts to keep out of our mind.

Kick It Out

Here's how you can do that. Once you become conscious of a negative feeling, immediately ask yourself what thought triggered it. If it's a lie, tell the Spirit of God that you reject that thought and don't want it in your mind again. Ask him to keep it out of your mind and if it returns to let you know so you can kick it out again. Replace that negative thought with a positive, truthful thought.

When you first begin this practice you'll likely be busy kicking out negative thoughts and replacing them with positive ones. As time passes, and your emotions stabilize, the pace of kicking out negative thoughts will slow. As you focus on positive things, the toxic emotions will washout of your system and will be replaced with healthy, healing ones.

I discovered these truths while living the Jesus Experiment. If you'd like to understand the science behind what you've just read, get a copy of *Who Switched off My Brain*, by Carolyn Leaf.

*Today's article is adapted from my book, *The Jesus Experiment*.*