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Control Your Thoughts, Control Your Life

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I was eight years old and riding a quarter horse across some land my family owned outside of Roswell, New Mexico. As I rode away from the stables he repeatedly resisted and tried to reverse direction. After we had gone a couple hundred yards he suddenly turned toward the stables and darted toward them at full speed.

I tugged the reins to the right, trying to control him. I pulled the reins back, trying to slow him. Nothing worked. I was a fly on his tail trying to control him with my antennas. Finally, I gave up and held on as we raced toward the one thing he wanted … food.

Runaway Horses

My thoughts, like runaway horses, want me to ride them wherever they go. Problem is, they may run to darkness. And when it comes to my thoughts, I prefer light to dark. You see, I can quickly go from summer sun on a clear day to black clouds, rain and floods. I'm not denying bad weather happens. I'm denying that gives me reason to create phantom storms. I can't control the weather but I can control my thoughts about the weather. And if I control my thoughts, I control my emotions.

So that surfaces the question: how do I control my thoughts?

A Downer Thought With an Upside

Before I address that question, I want you to know that what I share may not work for you the first time through. That's a downer thought with an upside reality: *The lower you sink the more likely you'll succeed*. Weird, isn't it? It's the idea that a drunk often has to hit "rock bottom" before changing. Psychiatrist, Abraham Twerski called it the *law of human gravity*: a person will continue down a path of harmful behavior until the pain of continuing is greater than the pain of stopping.

It's like a sling shot. The more darkness pulls us away, into the shadows, the greater the thrust toward God when the stretched band is released. This because when you discover the pain of letting runaway thoughts control your mind is greater than the pain of controlling them yourself, you will, by God's grace and the power of the Spirit, begin to control your thoughts.

You can succeed, by God's power, when you decide you're done thinking in a way that's hurting you and those you love. Until you reach that point you'll likely continue to let lying thoughts torment you. If you've come to that place then with persistence and the power of God's Spirit you'll get the horse under control and enjoy the ride.

What Works for Me

Here's what works for me. When I *feel* a negative emotion I ask the Spirit of God to show me the triggering thought. I've found that with fear, for instance, the triggering thought is often a lie. Such lies are toxic and cause the brain to signal the release of chemicals that produce negative and destructive emotions. By destructive, I mean when excessive and out of control they poison a person and may produce depression, anxiety, loss of appetite, loss of sleep, impotency, lack of motivation and suicidal thoughts.

Every emotion you experience is based on a thought. That thought is either true or false. I battled with fear for years until I learned to identify the lying thought that triggered it. Once I identified the lie I kicked it out and replaced it with truth. I read that after we have a toxic thought we've got a few seconds to reject it.

If we do, the brain will treat it as vapor and it will vanish. So will the accompanying toxic emotions it's feeding. Did you catch that last sentence? When we stop toxic thinking by rejecting the lies behind them, the toxic emotions will disappear over time. If you've been riding a runaway horse for awhile, it will take time to retrain it to obey your commands.

Kick It Out, Replace It

Paul stressed the importance of immediate action against temptation: *"No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but* ***with the temptation will provide the way of escape*** *also, so that you will be able to endure it"* (1 Corinthians 10:13). The moment you feel the negative emotion, identify the triggering thought, if it's a lie immediately kick it out and replace it with truth. The temptation to obsess over the lie must be rejected "with the temptation."

What Purpose Is the Lie Serving?

Once you've kicked out the lie and replaced it with truth, you need to ask a follow-up question: *What purpose is this lie serving?* I concluded that I was imagining the worst possible outcome of my situation in order to prepare myself for the inevitable.

Of course, such a prediction meant believing a lie that the bad event would occur. I was suffering in the present the pain of a future phantom event. Fact is, what I feared never occurred. I obsessively dragged tomorrow's clouds into the present so I could sit under them today to prepare myself for an imagined future storm.

After I identified the purpose of the lying thoughts, I knew such thinking didn't prepare me for tomorrow's disaster. Indeed, it depressed me, fogged my thinking, and robbed me, and those around me, of the Lord's joy and confidence. Once I realized the thoughts that fed my fear were lies and the purpose they served bogus, I determined in the Lord, not to think about them and replace them with truth. Once I sopped the toxic thinking, the toxic emotions subsided.

Dwell on These Things

I believe such a practice enables us to think as God, through the Apostle Paul, commanded us to think. When we do, we also experience the promise of God's presence and peace.

"*Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.* [9] *The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you."* Philippians 4:8--9