

BREAKING FREE
FROM

NEGATIVE THOUGHT SPIRALS

A BIBLICAL GUIDE



DANIELLE BERNICE

Breaking Free from Negative Thought Spirals

A Biblical Guide

Danielle Bernice



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Breaking Free from Negative Thought Spirals – A Biblical Guide
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Introduction

Sometimes we can feel caught in a downward spiral of increasingly negative thoughts about ourselves, another person, or a specific situation. These thoughts can be overwhelming and difficult to break out of in the moment. They affect the way we feel about ourselves, but also our relationships and the way we interact with people. These thought spirals can leave us feeling lonely, distressed, and even depressed. All in all, they stand in the way of a fruitful life with Jesus.

Why do we sometimes get stuck in these negative thought spirals, and how do we break out of them? What does the Bible teach us about this destructive form of rumination?

I used to struggle with these negative thought spirals a lot, especially before receiving therapy for PTSD and before Jesus saved me. But even after that, I could get caught up in them occasionally. So I figured that if I had technically been set free, I was probably doing something habitually that kept luring me back in.

A couple of months ago, a friend of mine and I were discussing how we could get rid of these spirals once and for all. That is when I decided to explore this topic to see if I could find Biblical solutions to the problem. Thank God that I did because while exploring this, I uncovered

quite a few habits that caused and exacerbated these spirals in me. After that realization, I was able to prevent these spirals from forming and to put a stop to them when negative thoughts still managed to seep through and take hold. This has made me feel more at ease and generally happier! So, naturally, I'm eager to share my findings with you!

How to use this guide

This short book is meant to provide practical Biblical guidelines and insights for managing and preventing negative thought spirals. It aims to demonstrate that we don't have to be victims when it comes to these unpleasant experiences, but that God has given us the tools to claim a victory that is already ours through Christ. I would like to encourage you to keep a Bible and a notebook handy as you read this book, so that you can look up Scripture references in your favorite translation, and take notes when the Holy Spirit speaks to you about something that might be helpful in your particular situation.

I hope this guide will encourage anyone who is plagued by negative thoughts, and that it will lead to increased hope, peace, and joy in Christ.

Who can be affected by negative thought spirals?

You are not alone if you feel that you suffer from these thought spirals. Negative thought spirals can affect anyone, but there are people who are more prone to this negative way of thinking. For example, people who:

- Have low self-esteem or insecurities
- Suffer from CPTSD
- Are [highly sensitive](#)
- Have mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety disorders, or OCD
- Are in a critical or unsupportive social circle

When you look at this list, you might think that these spirals are solely a matter of mental stability, but that is not the case. As you will see, this is as much a spiritual battle as it is a mental battle. Let's start by looking at the main causes of negative thought spirals.

The main causes of negative thought spirals

We are spirit, soul, and body (1 Thessalonians 5:23), and all three parts of us influence each other. This means that our physical, mental, and spiritual well-being can influence the way we think or feel about certain things.

I've dedicated a chapter in another book (*Overcoming Burnout through Biblical Tactics*) to explaining this relationship with various Biblical exercises for mental well-being, so I won't go into that too much in this guide. Here, I would like to focus on two things we do that cause negative thought spirals:

1. Judging like the devil
2. Judging according to the flesh

The reasons for setting off and becoming trapped in these negative cycles can mostly be traced back to one or both of these categories. Let's explore both.

Judging like the devil

When we are not wearing the [Armor of God](#), we are vulnerable to the enemy's attacks: His accusations, deceptions, distractions, temptations, and all the other trickery he has up his sleeve will hit us so hard that we will

not be able to stand our ground (Ephesians 6:11-18). The enemy is well aware of this and prowls around like a predator seeking to devour anyone who is proud, vulnerable, or not paying attention (1 Peter 5:8).

One of the ways he can affect our thinking is by spreading deceitful lies (2 Corinthians 11:3-5). Thankfully, as God's children, we have the ability and freedom to believe only what is from God (1 John 4:1-6). Because if we believe the lies and false accusations the devil feeds us (often through other people), we can easily doubt a person's intentions, attitudes, or actions and put them in an undeserved negative light (Acts 14:2, Romans 16:17-18, Ephesians 4:25-27). The reason why we are tempted to believe these deceptions, is because of our own deep-seated, corrupted, carnal desires (James 1:14), but we will explore the role of our flesh in the next section.

These deceptions can be about big things, such as our understanding of important passages of Scripture, or small, everyday things that, through increasingly negative thoughts, can become such a hindrance that they begin to stand between us and God. For example, we all know that puzzled feeling we sometimes get when somebody does not respond to a text message. If we let him, the enemy might use that opportunity to accuse the other person of all kinds of things or to accuse us of having said something wrong. If we don't wear the armor, we may believe these accusations and fall into a downward spiral of negative thinking that could even lead to complete despondency.

The devil's accusations cause us to see and judge the world through a veil of darkness and lies rather than through the loving, merciful, patient, truthful, and forgiving eyes of our Father. Of course, the wrath and judgment of God are real too, but they are meant for those who arrogantly follow the ways of the world, thus of the Accuser, the prince of this world (John 5:24, 12:48, Romans 8:1).

This automatically implies that judging the world the way the merciless Accuser does, sets one up for being judged in the same way: without mercy (James 2:13). And isn't that what Jesus taught when He said: "Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you." (Matthew 7:1-2 ESV).

Or James when he said: "Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door." (James 5:9 ESV)

If such judgments lead to being judged, it does not make sense to use them as a form of discipline or even self-discipline; they are destructive rather than constructive. It seems to me that the belief that using harsh judgments on yourself will make you a better version of yourself is a common falsehood. This misconception may be based on unhealthy patterns acquired in childhood and may reflect the judgmental way one (subconsciously) looks at other people. We should treat others as we would like to be treated (Matthew 7:12), but what is stopping us

from judging other people if deep down we believe that it is beneficial to be judged?

Harsh thoughts like “I’m so stupid,” “I’m worthless,” “No one likes me,” or “I will never succeed,” are as unconstructive and arrogant as saying the opposite. Why? Because they take God out of the equation and therefore they are based on lies. The truth is that:

- He provides wisdom (James 1:5)
- You are His creation, a son or daughter of the King of kings, a temple of God, and the light of the earth (Ephesians 2:10, John 1:12, 1 Corinthians 3:16, Matthew 5:14)
- He is your Friend and the Father Who loves you (John 15:15, 1 John 3:1)
- You can do all things through Christ Who strengthens you (Philippians 4:13)

Besides, we are to build up the Body of believers (1 Thessalonians 5:11, Ephesians 4:29, Romans 14:19), and *you* are part of that Body. You are also a person that needs to be built up and encouraged rather than judged unfairly - even by yourself.

The Accuser never has our best intentions in mind; he seeks to destroy, and he is a liar (John 8:44). So you can be sure that whatever he whispers in your ear is not meant to build up, but rather to destroy. When we believe and accept what he says, we partake in that destruction, whether that is the destruction of ourselves or of other people. Instead of seeing people, situations, and ourselves

in God's Light, we see it through a shroud of dark, ominous clouds. This shroud causes us to see assumptions and risks as realities. As a result, fear, anger, and sadness soon make a home in our hearts. And unless we break out of this spiral, those emotions are there to stay in the form of bitterness or dejection.

Judging according to the flesh

Even when judgment is not clouded by the devil, it can be hard to see yourself, your circumstances, and other people through God's eyes:

- Our flesh can be weakened by disease, hormones, trauma, and other factors that make us view the world a bit darker than we normally would or should.
- We might have a panic attack, which can temporarily impair our thinking and judgment.
- We could be blinded by fleshly states like arrogance, lust, rage, or jealousy.
- Our minds could be chemically clouded, for example, by (medicinal) drugs or alcohol.

Besides these obvious reasons, the flesh can sometimes influence our judgment more subtly. We may have ingrained false beliefs, like we saw in the previous paragraph, that hinder us from judging correctly.

In many cases, judgment is clouded because we project our deep-seated fears onto the situation.

If deep down we fear being rejected, we view the world through those glasses. We will think that people who are not responding to text messages are rejecting us, while they might have other reasons for not replying that have nothing to do with us.

Or, if we fear losing something or someone, we may ruminate on ways that could happen and become anxious and overprotective, judging harmless situations as threatening.

And if we fear that we are not good enough, we start to compare ourselves with other people and make distinctions based on things like good looks or riches (James 2:4). Or the thought “I made a mistake at work,” will hurt excessively and lead to thoughts like “I’m always messing up,” and “I can’t handle it.”

But even at its best, the flesh is a poor judge: It doesn’t have all the facts, it can’t foresee the future, and it can’t control other people or read their minds. Seriously, nothing good comes from doing anything by the flesh (Romans 7:18, Galatians 5:19-21). “The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace.” (Romans 8:6, NIV) So, we should not judge according to human standards but with right judgment (John 8:15, 7:24).

The right(eous) way to judge

So, how do we judge right(eous)ly? Firstly, we should take every thought captive to make it obedient to Christ and destroy every lie that tries to take hold in our minds (2 Corinthians 10:5). We should continuously compare thoughts and behaviors to what is written in God's Word, so that we know when something is not right and we need to change course. If we find that we are not acting in accordance with God's Word, we know that we have sinned and need to repent. That way, we judge ourselves according to the standard God set, so that God doesn't judge and discipline us instead (1 Corinthians 11:31-32). Following God's Word also prevents us from following the misleading whispers of the enemy, for the two are mutually exclusive.

Secondly, we should not judge by appearances (John 7:24). Our carnal understanding of the Bible is superficial, and without the Holy Spirit's help, we miss the deeper meaning and intentions of God's Word. As a result, we judge superficially, and often legalistically, on the basis of what the text appears to mean. That means that we still act by what we see, the very thing that Jesus teaches us not to do. If we judge God's Word in this manner, we get the wrong idea, or at least a very limited idea, of Who God is. Up until Jesus's crucifixion, most people judged Him in this superficial way, and so they misjudged Him tremendously. Without the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we still judge Jesus and other people in this way: We hear

something about someone, we see someone on TV regularly, and we feel that we know that person and have gained the right to judge him or her. Yet, we really don't: "For who knows a person's thoughts except their own spirit within them? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God." (1 Corinthians 2:11, NIV). We will dig a bit deeper into this command about not judging by appearances later.

If both the enemy and the flesh are bad judges, there is only one truly righteous Judge: God. Therefore, we need to see the world the way He does. That should not be too hard, since His Spirit lives in us. Only by looking through the lens of the Word of God (Jesus!), can we see ourselves, the people, and the things around us through God's eyes. Only then do we see things as clearly as we should, enabling us to extend the same mercy, patience, and kindness to people, including ourselves.

This is the reason why I named the ministry's website DanielleBernice.com. Danielle means "God is my Judge" and Bernice means "Bringer of victory". I deeply believe that the road to victory, even over negative thought spirals, is found by making God your one true Judge. Having a deeper understanding of His Word and seeing the world the way He does, makes all the difference in the way we see ourselves, and the way we see other people.

Eight fleshly habits that cause negative thought spirals

With the previous observations in mind, we can establish quite a few habits that can cause or worsen negative thought spirals. Let's look at eight habits we should avoid to prevent negative thought spirals:

1. **Fixating on one negative detail**

For example, when a [perfectionist](#) is so focused on one tiny mistake that he or she cannot see how objectively well they did. The same goes for those who hear only the negative feedback and either don't accept or forget the positive feedback. I am particularly prone to this one myself.

2. **Black and white thinking**

This kind of thinking can make someone or something seem either absolutely amazing or terribly bad, based on what we see or hear.

3. **Labeling in a judgmental way**

When you label yourself, others, or situations in a judgmental way, you will see them through that lens from that moment on and everything will fit that label. It can work like a curse: when you think "This is going to be a bad day..." in the morning because you hit your toe on the way to the bathroom, what kind of day do you think it's going

to be? But, perhaps surprisingly, thinking the opposite “This is going to be a great day,” isn’t much better: the authority of any day should be in God’s hands; we don’t know the future. All we know is that every day in this broken world comes with its troubles (Matthew 6:34).

4. Comparing yourself to others

Widespread media makes it easier than ever for people to compare themselves to others. But if you deem someone better or worse than yourself, you either put yourself down or you exalt yourself. And how do you measure this difference? By health, wealth, or success in numbers? But what measure does God use? Who does He exalt?

5. Trying to predict what the future will hold or what other people think

This often starts with a worry that slowly turns into a reality. For example, thinking that people dislike you when they don’t contact you, or not contacting someone in fear of rejection. But only God knows another person’s heart and the future, so why do we try to sit on His throne?

6. Thinking that you are in control over other people’s responses if you behave in a certain way

For example, if you expect a person to be kind to you when you communicate in a certain way, or if

you are kind enough to them. If they aren't kind in response, you either blame yourself for not communicating well enough, get angry with them for not responding kindly enough, feel disappointed because of all the unanswered effort you put in, or you might feel like a failure unworthy of love. This one often goes hand in hand with numbers 1, 3, and 5 on this list.

7. Believing that you are right, and that what you think about something or someone is the truth

If another person doesn't agree, or if you are proven wrong, this can deeply impact the way you see yourself. The reality is that only God holds the absolute Truth.

8. Believing assumptions

This one relates to all the previous ones on the list. When we make assumptions based on limited information, we jump to conclusions that aren't necessarily true, and oddly enough, often negative.

At the heart of these habits lies one core issue: not seeing the world through God's eyes. When we live by the flesh, we judge by the flesh.

Eight Biblical habits to break free from negative thought spirals

Since we should look to the Bible to judge our own behaviors and find ways to do better, we can also look to the Bible to find the best ways to get rid of negative thought spirals.

One thing that has become clear, is that our fleshly habits aren't doing us any good. Our old fleshly habits are like dirty, unsuitable clothes that we need to get rid of: even if that worn-out, stained, hole-ridden sweater still feels comfortable at times, we should still put on new, clean, sparkling white clothes that reflect the light of Jesus wherever we go! Or let's read what Paul wrote we should do: "to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness." Ephesians 4:22-24 (ESV).

There was a time when all we did was follow the thoughts and desires of our flesh, but Jesus set us free from that (Ephesians 2:1-3). By saving us, He has given us the freedom to make different - righteous - choices when it comes to our thoughts, feelings, and actions (Romans 8). Becoming less worldly and more holy is part of growing and maturing in Christ (1 Corinthians 3:1-3). So, what are we waiting for? Let's step into our freedom and replace those old fleshly habits with befitting Biblical ones.

1 Accept feedback in love

Feedback should be upbuilding and encouraging (1 Thessalonians 5:11, Ephesians 4:29). And I believe that it is important to give ourselves feedback in the same way: with the intention to build ourselves up (Jude 1:20).

The intention of feedback is up to the feedback giver, who can do his or her best to ensure that the tone of their feedback matches the intention. But after that, it is up to the receiver if and how they accept it. Upbuilding feedback can become a discouragement when the receiver only hears that they missed the mark and then spirals into thinking that they are a failure.

Prayer is an important key in this situation: the one giving the feedback should pray that their feedback is given and received in the most constructive manner, while the receiver should pray that they may understand God's upbuilding purpose of the feedback and receive it with thanksgiving. This way, both can have an open heart, without giving the enemy room to interfere with misunderstandings, distractions, or falsely perceived malintent.

We should also realize that how we receive feedback is up to us and us alone. That's the part of feedback that we do have control over. We can choose to discard it or accept it. When someone does not agree with us and makes that clear in a hurtful way, we can choose to react in many different ways. If we let our carnal emotions take the upper hand, we might explode in anger or (passive)

aggression, or we might implode and burst into tears feeling terrible. But there are other, more constructive ways to respond that begin with separating your identity from that of the feedback giver. Each person has his or her own viewpoints, experiences, and opinions, and all Christians are working out their own salvation (Philippians 2:12-13). Our views don't have to agree with theirs views to be valuable. Ours should be the same as God's, period. If our views align with God's we can hope that the views of others align with God's too, especially if they are Christians who seek unity of mind through Christ. But we should not adjust our viewpoints away from God's in order to try to agree (or disagree) with another person, nor should we quarrel about it (2 Timothy 2:23, Titus 3:9).

Therefore, someone whose identity is firmly rooted in Christ will be much more successful at receiving feedback in a constructive way (Colossians 2:6-8). Being rooted in Christ will help you realize that not having the same opinions on everything does not have to mean that you are less loved or that you have been rejected or devalued in any way. When you are rooted in Christ, your value and acceptance is not based on the ever-changing opinions of other people, but stands firm in God alone. This stability will be reflected in the way you think, feel, and express yourself.

We should also remind ourselves that Christ suffered and died for us while we were in complete disagreement with Him. He forgave us for that, and that is why we can forgive others who may not see things as clearly, or who may lash out at us, even when we feel hurt by it.

Learning to accept feedback when dealing with one's own failures can be difficult, but it is necessary for growth (Proverbs 19:20, 12:1, 15:31-33). Paul's letters contained a lot of feedback meant for the upbuilding of the churches, and Christians have used that feedback to grow ever since. Jesus did the same in Revelation.

Receiving negative feedback does not mean that you are a failure. It simply means that you can do better in that area. And the Bible teaches us that we can always grow and do better, as we are being sanctified until we die. So, when we read the Bible, the Holy Spirit will provide us with feedback all the time, as long as we are willing to accept it. He kindly points out when we fail, but He doesn't hold it against us; instead, He encourages us to get up and do better next time. That is the way we should also approach ourselves: build yourself up by growing from feedback, be polished through it, rather than judging and condemning yourself as a result of it.

2 Build your house on the Rock

How do you look at other people? Do you look up to smart people with many degrees? Do you admire people who are very successful at what they do? Are you inspired by particularly beautiful or charismatic people? It might be hard to admit, but most people do, to a certain degree.

Now consider what looking at people in this way says about your own life. It says something about what you

value in life, and it says something about how you judge yourself in comparison. In turn, that influences your thinking:

- You may automatically think that someone must be right if they have more education on a certain topic than you.
- It can be alluring to think that you are unsuccessful if you compare your success to that of another.
- It can be tempting to think that you aren't attractive when you compare your looks to someone else's.

If what you strive for and what you think is right or wrong depends on what you see, your thoughts and feelings will depend on things that are subjective to change. You might find yourself feeling confident in a workplace with colleagues less educated or experienced than you. But the moment you step into a room filled with people known for their knowledge and expertise who openly disagree with you, your confidence will evaporate. The next thing you know, you'll be feeding yourself negative thoughts about your skills, intelligence, or self-worth.

The same goes for appearance. If you grow up in an era and culture where having a slim body is the beauty norm, you might feel offended when someone calls you voluptuous, while another might receive it as a compliment.

Therefore, our perception of people should not depend on the standards of this world, but on the immutable Word of God.

If your answer was ‘yes’ to some of the questions I asked, consider that Jesus was none of those things in the world’s eyes, and yet, we look to Him to know how to live life.

Jesus was often opposed by learned, rich, and arrogant teachers of the Law and Pharisees. Yet, He never lost confidence in Who He was, what He knew, or what His purpose was. He built His house on the Rock, and that means that He was unshakable. He knew the Word of God, and He acted on It. And in turn, people were astounded at His teaching. Why? Because He demonstrated the infinite wisdom of God.

3 Judge with right judgment

“Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment.” (John 7:24, ESV). Jesus said this after the Jews were astonished at the fact that He could teach the Word when He wasn’t educated like they were. Sometimes things seem a certain way, but when you look at the situation through God’s eyes, you will see that reality is very different.

The people He spoke to did not understand the true purpose of circumcision, or the entire Law for that matter. Yet they thought they did and judged by their

presumptions and flawed reasoning. They looked to education, while Jesus looked to God for His teaching. They wanted to see works and miracles; Jesus wanted to see God's plan fulfilled. They saw rules that suppressed people; Jesus saw healing that set people free.

People have a tendency to judge by what they see and use this judgment to create a picture of a person. Someone wearing shabby clothes is perceived as poor, someone who is sick might be contagious, someone giving hugs and kisses is seen as loving, and so on. But history teaches us that these assumptions aren't always correct and can even be dangerous. Remember how Joshua was deceived by people dressed in worn-out clothes pretending to come from a faraway country? Or how Absalom won the hearts of the people through handshakes and kisses in an attempt to conspire against King David? You can read about these misjudgments in Joshua 9 and 2 Samuel 15.

Furthermore, throughout history, superficial judgments have led to discrimination and partiality (James 2:1-4).

If we would stop judging by appearance, it would save us from a lot of compartmentalized thinking. We would refrain from labeling people to try to fit them into rigid, oversimplified, and narrow categories and stereotypes. Consequently, we would have fewer negative thoughts about people and circumstances. Also, by not seeking confirmation of our biases based on past experiences, we would think more openly and positively about people and circumstances.

Of course, we should not become reckless, but we should always view people from God's wise and loving

perspective. Jesus constantly did this and was not deceived by anyone, for God showed Him the truth about people in His spirit. He loved everyone, including the sick, the poor, the outcasts, and even His enemies so much that He gave His life for them. Because of Him, we can and should follow His example.

4 Do not compare yourself to others

Rather than looking at the lives of other people to gauge our success, we should look at the life of Jesus to assess our own progress. When it comes to spiritual matters, brothers and sisters in Christ can serve as inspiration. We can compare ourselves with the aim of building up our faith, attitudes, and understanding of the Word. However, comparing ourselves in terms of prosperity, appearance, success, health, and wealth can be dangerous. If you look at someone and think they are doing better than you in any of these areas, not only are you focusing on worldly things, but it is also easy to start feeling inadequate in your walk with God and become unfruitful. For instance, comparing ourselves to those who appear more attractive may lead to feelings of dissatisfaction, bitterness, jealousy, or unworthiness. It may also cause us to excessively focus on worldly pursuits like dieting, weightlifting, clothes, and beauty products, implicitly disregarding God's creation and His plan for our lives (1 John 2:16). Jesus said that the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the Word, making it

unfruitful (Matthew 13:22). James also said that this covetousness and seeking to satisfy worldly desires leads to enmity with God and to quarreling with each other (James 4:1-4). This means that comparing yourself to others in this way is dangerous for your relationship with yourself, with others, and with God!

Thinking that we are better or holier than others in any way is dangerous too. This fleshly attitude leads to self-exaltation, fostering arrogance, strife, jealousy, anger, disputes, slander, gossip, grumbling, faultfinding, and conflict among people (2 Corinthians 12:20, James 3:13-16, 4:1-10, Jude 16). Each time we look down on someone, we exalt ourselves. Instead, we should humble ourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt us (James 4:10-12).

In Psalm 73, Asaph wrote about almost stumbling when he became bitterly envious of the prosperity of the arrogant. He only saw the truth when he stopped focusing on them and refocused on God. After refocusing, he was able to repent, and instead of being overwhelmed with negativity, he was filled with hope and desire for God. So much so, that in gratitude he wanted to tell of God's works.

I believe that gratitude is also a good starting point: intently focusing on God's goodness and blessings in your life, will fill your heart with joy, love, hope, faith, and peace, rather than envy. Comparing yourself to others will

stand in the way of gratitude, and replaces it with envy, contempt, and grumbling.

5 Let God be God and man be man

James warned us against thinking that we are in control of our future when he wrote: “Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit’— yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.’ As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.” (James 4:13-16, ESV)

We don’t know what the future holds, or whether God will do something unexpected. He cares for us, which means we should not worry about the future (Matthew 6:34).

Similarly, we should not concern ourselves with other people’s thoughts, nor should we arrogantly assume we know exactly what another person is thinking. “For who knows a person’s thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him?” (1 Corinthians 2:11a, ESV). Only that person and God know what is going on in his or her mind. If God does not reveal it to you for His glory, you can only speculate about the other person’s thoughts. But speculation opens the door to spiraling thoughts and believing falsehoods from the enemy. A better approach is either to eliminate guesswork by asking the person directly

what he or she is thinking, or to leave the matter in God's hands.

6 Seek to please God first

If we want to please God, we need to do away with all our carnal ways with the help of the Holy Spirit, because they don't please God (Romans 8:6-14). Following the Holy Spirit is the only way to please God, but it is also the best way to get rid of negative thought spirals rooted in people-pleasing or seeking validation from other people. Avoiding rejection by being extra agreeable or affirming someone because they affirm you may seem nice, but it's still carnal.

God is love, meaning love is not just a part of His character but it is defined by Him (1 John 4:8, 16). Whatever He does is loving; even His wrath is motivated by love. He wants us to become more like Him, which means following His example and loving the way He does. We can do that because He is part of us, so Love is part of us (1 John 4:8-17). Loving like He does is key: "For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" (Galatians 5:14, ESV).

One thing God teaches us is that true kindness out of Love expects nothing in return (Luke 6:35). The mercy, grace, forgiveness, and love we receive from Him are completely undeserved; Christ died for us while we were still sinners (Romans 5:8). This implies that using kindness as a means to avoid rejection or to manipulate others into

treating us kindly in return is contrary to God's way. We should be kind regardless of whether others reciprocate our kindness or not (Matthew 5:43-48).

God desires us to do good works out of love for Him and others. Not to earn a place in heaven or to win people's approval for ourselves, but to win hearts for Christ. Therefore, any effort aimed at self-glorification through seeking appreciation, validation, or popularity is wasted. If we invest more effort in loving people with God's love, it would be time better spent and it would not lead to negative thought spirals when our love is one-sided or met with disapproval. Instead of feeling bad about it, we would remember the time when *we* did not return God's love, but responded ungratefully, disapprovingly, and mockingly. And we would remember that our mission is not to please people but to please God (Galatians 1:10).

Moreover, when we are naturally loving and kind because it reflects our character, we are effortlessly being our true selves. If others are not drawn to that love and light, that is a terrible shame, but it is mostly their loss. For what fellowship can light have with darkness (2 Corinthians 6:14)? It is better to remain true to our Jesus-like, God-pleasing self and leave people's responses between them and God.

7 Do not lean on your own understanding

If anything, I hope the previous points have demonstrated that without God, we are not wise at all. By nature, we resist being humbled, quickly make judgments based on appearances, compare ourselves to others, attempt to control our futures, and seek approval for the wrong reasons. This is a recipe for having all kinds of negative thoughts about ourselves and others.

The truth is, we are all fallible. We do not know what the future holds, what others think, or what the truth is unless God reveals it to us. Recognizing this humbles us and reminds us to always seek God's counsel, rather than making judgments independently. When we acknowledge that our perceptions may differ from what we see or think, we become more open-minded towards the future, our circumstances, each other, God, and ourselves. Proverbs 3:5 (NIV) says: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding."

We need to trust the Lord with all our heart and stop leaning on our own understanding especially when our thoughts steer us into a spiral of negativity. We need to remember that He is always in control, He wants what is best for His children, and is faithful to fulfill His promises (Romans 8:28, Hebrews 10:23). With that in mind, we should not run with every thought we have and accept it as truth. Instead, we take every thought captive to make it obedient to Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5). Only thoughts that align with His Word, have the right to take hold in our minds. If the thought is not in agreement with God's

Word, rebuke it in Jesus' Name, discard it, and replace it with Truth.

Of course, there can be situations, many even, where we are right and others do not acknowledge it. Ruminating on this, can also lead to negative thoughts and feelings. Instead of ruminating, we can look to Jesus as our example. He was *always* right in *every* way but received little acknowledgment; in fact, He was killed for speaking the Truth. Yet, He did not look down on Himself as a result of this lack of acknowledgement. Even if others did not recognize the Truth, He knew He was doing and saying the right things in God's eyes, and ultimately, that is what matters most.

8 Don't base your thoughts and feelings on assumptions

Basing thoughts, feelings, and actions on assumptions is unwise and can even be dangerous. Just like crossing the street based on assumptions can cost you your life. That is why we need to check the facts before we make important decisions.

Let's look at some examples of assumptions that can lead to negative thought spirals:

- "My friend is upset; I must have done something wrong."
- "I'm always awkward at social events."

- “If I don’t get this job, I will never find a good job again.”
- “I asked a dumb question in class and now everyone thinks that I’m dumb.”
- “They won’t like my presentation anyway.”

Such thoughts are neither true nor constructive. Besides, who put you in charge? You are not the all-knowing, all-powerful God. God can change anyone and any situation, which means there is no reason whatsoever to assume anything bad.

Assuming things leaves no room for alternative outcomes. In fact, instead of looking for alternatives to what you are assuming, what follows will often confirm that assumption: “Look! He didn’t greet me! He’s annoyed with me, I knew it.”

Tearing yourself down is not even the worst thing assumptions can do. I have witnessed how assumptions can devastate lives, from family conflicts to wars. Most of the time, those assumptions are based on misunderstanding, miscommunication, and trust in one’s own wisdom. Then, as a result of ruminating on what we think we know, anger builds up until it explodes.

My background in Communication has taught me that at the root of many misunderstandings lies a communication problem compounded or caused by spiritual issues. Due to human fallibility, people often communicate poorly, especially when cultural differences and personal preferences clash. Things worsen when pride,

fear, and other spiritual and mental barriers hinder seeking and extending forgiveness, so that negative thoughts are intensified and conflicts escalate quickly.

None of this would be necessary if everyone lived according to the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). These virtues allow inadequate communication to be received in the way of Love. And many of you know that love has a certain character: “Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.” (1 Corinthians 13:4-7, ESV). This is the perfect way to communicate with one another, and it will not allow any irritations based on assumptions to take hold.

Even when bad intentions are confirmed, we don’t have to spiral into negative thinking about those people or ourselves. A much more effective and efficient course than overthinking and ruminating would be taking action. For example:

- Praying for wisdom (Philippians 4:6, James 1:5)
- Praying for them (Luke 6:28, Matthew 5:44)
- Forgiving them (Luke 6:37, Matthew 18:21-22, Mark 11:25)
- Blessing them (Romans 12:14-21, 1 Corinthians 4:12, 1 Peter 3:9)
- Praising God (2 Chronicles 20:22)

For all parties involved, all of these alternatives are constructive rather than destructive. They put God at the center and at the wheel instead of our thoughts and feelings.

Negative thought spirals versus negative thought patterns

If you find that some negative thoughts recur persistently, it may be a good idea to set some time apart to analyze them to identify their cause. Persistent negative thoughts can stem from habitual patterns of negative thinking, often developed during childhood. These negative thought patterns are distinct from negative thought spirals, though they often overlap.

Negative thought patterns often stem from past experiences and can include thoughts such as “I’m not good enough,” “I’ll never succeed,” or “People always let me down.” They can be aggravated when negative thoughts and emotions from past trauma are triggered by current events.

Negative thought spirals, on the other hand, are acute episodes where one negative thought triggers a cascade of increasingly negative thoughts. Thought patterns can lay the groundwork for thought spirals, which means that these patterns may have to be addressed before the spirals can be dealt with effectively.

Therapists are well-equipped to assist in managing these patterns. One of the methods they may apply is Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), which helps to identify negative thought patterns, challenge them, replace them with more constructive ones, and provide you with coping skills and strategies to break the cycle.

I would like to add a note of caution here. When opting for CBT, it's essential to ensure that the new thought patterns align with God's Word. Worldly affirmations such as "I am good as I am," or "I am powerful," and "I am in control of my life," are misleading at best, and demonic at worst. Did you realize that these types of affirmations were popularized by the New Age and New Thought movements? Just like anything in these movements, they sound positive and uplifting, while in fact they are false, destructive, and misleading. These affirmations often promote self-deification and ignore God's sovereignty over our lives.

Therefore, it is crucial to adopt Biblical affirmations that replace lies with Truth. Here are some examples:

- "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." (Romans 8:11, ESV)
- "I am not in the flesh, but in the Spirit." (Romans 8:9)
- "For those who love God all things work together for good." (Romans 8:28)
- "If God is for me, who can be against me?" (Romans 8:31)
- "Nothing will separate me from the love of Christ." (Romans 8:35, 38-39)
- "I am *more than* a conqueror through Christ." (Romans 8:37)
- "All things are possible with God." (Mark 10:27)

- “We suffer with Christ, but we will also be glorified with Him.” (Romans 8:17)
- “Christ has set me free for freedom.” (Galatians 5:1)
- “I am a child of Light, not of darkness.” (1 Thessalonians 5:5)
- “I will put my trust in Him.” (Hebrews 2:13)

These Biblical affirmations acknowledge God as the Source of goodness, grace, and mercy. They place our trust and hope in Him alone, recognizing His sovereignty and wisdom in all circumstances. Unlike worldly affirmations that rely on human strength and understanding, these affirmations are grounded in God’s truth and strength. That is why they are much more effective. Think about it: the reason we needed these affirmations in the first place is because we allowed a lie to take hold in our minds and our human strength failed. You will undoubtedly agree that it doesn’t make sense to replace one lie with another to arrive at an uplifting truth.

Practicing a kind of “Biblical CBT” can also be helpful to uncover why certain thoughts come to mind and how to deal with them. To know how this works, we can look at Psalm 73, written by Asaph.

In this Psalm, Asaph honestly recounts how he felt about seeing the wicked succeed. He vividly describes his envy, doubts, desires, and other feelings, but afterwards he replaces them with Truth. This truth became clear to him when he turned to God with his feelings (Psalm 73:16-17). He turned his focus away from worldly desires and back

onto the Lord and the hope of future glory. He even uses Biblical “affirmations” such as, “My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever,” and, “I have made the Lord God my refuge” (Psalm 73:26, 28a-b, ESV).

All of us can do this at home. You could put it into writing like Asaph, which helps to structure and bring clarity, and dedicate it to God. It does not have to be a poetic work of art for it to work; it can also be written in bullet points. But you could also do this with a Christian conversation partner, such as a pastoral caregiver, or in prayer.

It can help you to see with more clarity in which areas you need to shift your focus from the things of this world to God. For Asaph (or whomever he wrote the Psalm for), the pain points were seeing the prosperity, health, success, and wicked speech of evil people while he, in his innocence, was stricken and chastened every morning. When you look at this closely, it might remind you of Jesus, Who was also innocently stricken and chastened. It may also bring you back to the reality that Jesus taught us to deny ourselves and take up our cross and follow Him (Mark 8:34). And that is precisely what I’m trying to teach in this guide: Let’s stop following destructive fleshly habits and start following Jesus by incorporating life-giving habits from God’s Word!

Practical tips for breaking free

There is more to say about negative thought spirals than what I have written here, but I hope that this short guide makes clear that a sound spiritual basis can really help you interrupt and prevent these negative thoughts and emotions. With the Word as our lens, it becomes easier to filter thoughts as Godly or otherwise. Fleshly habits can be replaced by Biblical ones, and any thought that pops into your head that doesn't align with Scripture can be ignored or instantly rebuked in Jesus' Name. Don't allow negativity to interfere with your relationship with God, the people around you, or yourself.

Breaking free from these negative spirals takes practice, but with God's help, anyone can do it. Let's finish with some practical tools that will help you succeed:

1. **Wear the whole armor of God**

Putting on the full armor will help you stand against the tricks of the enemy.

2. **Pray consistently**

Ask God to help you overcome your negative thought spirals and to renew your mind. Prayer is one of the most powerful tools in breaking free from destructive thought patterns, and for receiving much-needed wisdom in this matter.

3. Identify the trigger

Pay attention to what triggers your negative thought spirals. Is it a specific situation, person, or type of thought? Knowing the trigger can help you address it more effectively.

4. Challenge your thoughts

Once you identify the negative thoughts, challenge their validity. Are they based on truth or assumptions? What does God's Word say about the situation?

5. Replace negative thoughts with God's truth

Find Scripture verses that counter the negative thoughts and meditate on them. Repeat those each time that you catch yourself in a similar spiral.

6. Thanksgiving

Shift your focus by reminding yourself of how God has faithfully blessed and helped you in the past. Thank God for His loving hand in your life. Heartfelt gratitude and praise will change your perspective from negativity to hope, faith, and joy.

7. Set your mind on things above

Train yourself to focus on eternal spiritual realities rather than fleeting earthly concerns.

8. Seek support

Talk to a trusted friend, mentor, or counselor about your struggles. They can provide encouragement, prayer, and practical advice.

Prayer and encouragements

Negative thought spirals can be challenging to deal with, but with God's help, you can overcome them. By recognizing the enemy's attacks, and exchanging fleshly habits for Godly ones, you can break free from negativity and live in the peace and joy that God intends for you.

Remember, you are not alone in this battle. Many other Christians are challenged by negative thoughts and are in a process of breaking free of them. It is a journey to learn to stand firm in the freedom that God has bought for us and to become more like Him.

Moreover, God is with you, and He has given you all the tools and resources you need to overcome this.

Stay vigilant, stay prayerful, and stay grounded in His Word.

Let's pray for God to help us:

Dear Heavenly Father,

We thank you for all the insights that you provide us in Your Word. Insights to edify and build us up, so that we may become more and more like You. Please continue to give us new insights as we seek to understand Your will. Fill our hearts with love, kindness, mercy, hope, joy, and peace so that we may more fully glorify Your Name by the Light we shine throughout our daily lives.

We know that having thoughts that break us and other people down, are not from you. But we also realize that we need your help to fully overcome them. Would you help us to put what we have learned into action? Help us to replace fleshly habits with Biblical ones, and lies from the enemy with Your truths. Deliver us from evil thoughts and lead us not into temptation.

*We ask this in Jesus' mighty Name.
Amen.*