

**Series: Peace of Mind  
“Turn Off Toxic Thoughts”  
Proverbs 4:23**

**Big Idea – Your thoughts have incredible power and you have incredible power over your thoughts.**

“No one is more influential in your life than you are, because no one talks to you more than you do.” —Dr. Paul David Tripp

“Be careful how you think; your life is shaped by your thoughts.” Proverbs 4:23 (Good News Translation)

Psychologists would call this the law of cognition. Essentially what the law of cognition teaches is what you think impacts what you believe, which impacts how you feel, which impacts what you do. Your life is always moving in the direction of your strongest thoughts

We are living in times where Chronic negativity is becoming an epidemic that's poisoning people's mental health right and left.

And unfortunately, this isn't just a practical problem. At its root, in many ways, it's a spiritual problem.

I am going to give a couple of foundational thoughts that we'll come back to again and again.

I want you to recognize the incredible truth that your thoughts have incredible power. Your thoughts have incredible power. The good news is that you have incredible power over your thoughts. Your thoughts are incredibly powerful.

Your life is moving in the direction of your strongest thoughts. But the good news is you're not a victim of your thoughts. By the power of God you can actually choose what you think about, and what you think about determines how you live. Your thoughts are incredibly powerful and you have incredible power over your thoughts.

“Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. 6The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace.” Romans 8:5-6

Now, how does this impact us? Verse six tells us. "The mind governed by the flesh" is what? "Is death, is darkness, is destruction. But the mind governed by the spirit is life

and peace." If you find yourself hurting, if you find yourself feeling broken, if you find yourself often being discouraged, could it be that your mind is set on the things of this world instead of set on the things of God, because when you set your mind on the things of God and the things of your spirit, you'll find life and peace in all that you do.

### **3 Goals:**

- 1 show you why negativity is hurting you.
2. help you identify a specific area of negativity in your own mindset.
3. show you how with the help of God, through his Word empowered by his Spirit, we can change from that which is bringing death to that which brings life and peace. that's our goal. Let's start at the beginning.

Why is negativity so toxic?

**Neuroscience has diagnosed a Negativity Bias in all humans.**

### **Negativity Bias**

**Negative events imprint on our brains more quickly and linger longer than positive ones.**

Negative events, something bad, something tragic, something unfortunate seems to hit our brains and sticks longer than positive ones.

several examples. What do you think spreads faster on social media, something positive or something negative? something negative! On any news app, which news stories gets more clicks, the negative ones or the positive ones? And the answer is the negative ones. They will say, if it bleeds, it leads.

And then for you, if you have a presentation coming up and you're really nervous about it and you do the presentation and you do a good job and afterwards five different people say, "Wow, that was amazing! You crushed it. That was so powerful. I love what you did." Five people loved it, and one person makes a negative comment. At the end of the day, are you thinking about the five positive things or are you lamenting the one negative thing? -- lamenting the one negative thing!

And what happens, unfortunately, is **chronic negativity**. It sends us into a constant state of fight or flight. And we're actually wired this way. It's not initially bad until it becomes bad, because in any stressful situation, God actually designed our brains to release cortisol into the blood system. And that's a good thing. At first, it makes us more alert. It makes us more focused. It makes us ready to deal with a problem. And it's good, until it's not.

When we become chronically negative, when we're stuck in an ongoing negative loop, we always feel like we're in danger. We always feel like there is a threat. Paul said it this way, "The mind governed by the flesh is death. But the mind governed by the spirit is life and peace."

What happens is when most of what you see online is negative, and what most of what your friends say is negative, and most of what you say to yourself is negative, and most of what you hear about in the news is negative, when you focus on the negative, what you're doing is you're creating **negative neural pathways**.

We've talked about this a lot. When you think a thought once, it's easier to think that thought again. And when you focus on the negative and you think on the negative some more and you hang around negative people and you're surrounded by criticism and you never think the best but you always think the worst, you're creating negative neural pathways, deep ruts in your brain, your mind, and very literally for you, negativity becomes a habit.

### **Negativity becomes a habit.**

It's a default posture. - that things are going to be bad and they're going to get worse, and you can't trust anybody and everybody's going to let you down. And all Christians are this, and life sucks and it's getting worse. And my mental health is bad and I'm never going to get anywhere, and I'm never going to be happy, and I'm never going to have a ministry, there's never going to be anything that really matters in life, I'm always going to be stuck here.

Quite literally negativity becomes your default habit posture. Think about it. "The mind governed by the flesh is death." The news you consume, the shows that you watch, the lyrics to the music that you play over and over and over again, the social media that you consume that makes you feel left out or jealous or angry or less-than, the people that you spend your time around, they all create this inner script that directs your life. Your thoughts have incredible power over the direction of your life. But the good news is you have incredible power over where your thoughts are taking you.

So let's try to identify that for you.

Experts say there's **four big specific buckets or areas of negativity**? What I want to try to do is help you define what is your one biggest one. If you cannot define it, you cannot defeat it. What is it that's holding you back? I'll give you **four big categories**. The **first one is what I might call relational cynicism**.

### **Where Are You Most Prone to Negativity?**

## **Cynicism**

What is this? **Relational cynicism** is a general distrust for people and their motives. It's you can't trust people. They're going to take advantage of you. Everyone is out for themselves. All those people are this way. No matter what you do, they're looking out for their interests. Nobody's really generous. Nobody's really benevolent. You can't really trust people.

By the way, according to the experts, this cynicism is generally a reflection of how you feel about yourself. Hate to say this, but when you distrust the motives of others, according to the experts, it often reveals that you don't really always like your motives. There's relational cynicism. And for some of you, that would be your one. You might say, "Yeah, I really am. I really don't trust people. I really think people are out for themselves all the time. I really don't have a good view of people." You might just say it. "This is what I am. I'm relationally cynical."

## **Negative Filtering**

This is always finding something wrong. Finding the worst possible thing to point out. It's overlooking what's good. It's overlooking what's right. It's maybe assuming the worst possible outcome. Your kids are running late and you think, "Oh my gosh, they must have been in an accident." And you thought that the last 18 times they were late and they were never in an accident, but you continue to think that. Or you text your friend and your friend doesn't respond for two hours, "Oh my gosh, my friend must be mad at me." It's looking for what's wrong instead of looking for what's right. And we see this a lot of times in a lot of different ways. You can go on a vacation and you find what's wrong with a vacation. You go to a restaurant and you find what's wrong with a restaurant. You meet a person, you figure out what's wrong with a person. You go to a church and, bless God, you know what's wrong with that church. It's negative filtering. It's finding what's wrong instead of seeing what's right. Some of you, that's yours.

## **Absolute Thinking**

This is kind of the all-or-nothing, black-or-white. If a man hurts you, all men are bad. If a woman lies to you, all women are liars. If a Republican does something, all Republicans are that, all Democrats are this, or whatever. If you make a mistake, it's like, oh, I'm just dumb. If you disagree with someone about an issue, you write the whole person off. In fact, in my opinion, we've seen more of this type of thinking in the last couple of years than in my entire lifetime. Well, they think that so screw them and I'm right, blah, la. It's absolute thinking. And some of you, you are so there and you cannot see it. You're a jerk to everybody because you're right about something. And just because you are right doesn't mean you're righteous. That's another sermon...

## **Blaming**

This is simply believing that you're always a victim. aka victim mentality or persecution complex.

The reason you're where you are is because someone else did something and got in your plan or way or took your toy, or didn't give you a chance and you feel like you don't have any control over what's happening to you. You're just a victim of life and circumstances. And there's no way for you to get ahead because the world is stacked against you.

That raises the question, if you find yourself constantly jealous or critical or discontent or assuming the worst or you're hard on other people and negative about other people or you're hard on yourself, can you change? Can you shift from a chronically negative mindset to one that's full of faith and reflects the heart and the character of God? Can you shift? the answer is yes, you can, but it's not easy.

I want to look at one of the most powerful illustrations of the mind with David in the Old Testament, and he shows us what to do when you are hit by, blindsided by an avalanche of negativity in 1st Samuel 30, Here's the context.

It was a bad day. It was worse than you can possibly imagine. However bad your week was, David's was much worse. David and his troops had just come home from battle, and they tragically discovered that an enemy force had burned their homes and kidnapped their wives and their children. So you got these warriors coming home, and David thinks it can't get any worse than this. They've burned our villages, they've taken our families, and he thought it couldn't get any worse. Until it did when his own men decided to turn on him and thought about stoning him. And we can read the story in scripture, where says this,

“When David and his men reached Ziklag, they found it destroyed by fire and their wives and sons and daughters taken captive. 4So David and his men wept aloud until they had no strength left to weep. ... 6David was greatly distressed because the men were talking of stoning him; each one was bitter in spirit because of his sons and daughters. But David found strength in the Lord his God.” (1 Samuel 30:3-4, 6)

### **How David fought toxic thinking:**

The King James version says it like this, In the middle of his darkest moment “David encouraged himself in the Lord his God.” vs. 6 KJV

Some of you in a world of chronic negativity, it's time for you to learn to encourage yourself in the Lord.

How did he do that? What did David say? Don't know—Not told.

Know what he said many other times—Talked to himself here are some great examples

Psalm 103:1 Praise the LORD, my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. 2 Praise the LORD, my soul, and forget not all his benefits—3 who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, 4 who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, 5 who satisfies your desires with good things... Ps 103:1-5

David reminded himself, Lord you:  
Anointed me as King—Chosen—Set apart  
Delivered me—Lion—Bear—Faith to fight Giant!  
Protected me from Saul's spears

8 The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. Psalm 103:8

Heard this verse b4? Sure?

15 But you, Lord, are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness. Psalm 86:15 (This one?)

8 The LORD is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. Psalm 145:8

Says that a lot! Didn't make it up!  
God said first—Describing himself to Moses—Ex 34:6

Exodus 34:6 6 And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth,

David had not only meditated on that verse—Memorized it! Psalm 119:11

When things got bad—Didn't have to go looking for verse!

**Greatest tool—Start acting like a COW! (Show)**

**Cow Ruminates**

Mouthful grass □ Chews. Swallows. Throws up. Chew. Swallows.  
Why?—Every bit of nutrition.

Ruminate—Meditate on God's Word!

Joshua 1:8 Study this Book of Instruction continually. Meditate on it day and night so you will be sure to obey everything written in it. Only then will you prosper and succeed in all you do.

13 May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Romans 15:13

Determine and say this to yourself **"I'm different!"**

## **Some of you need to go on a fast - Start a Negativity fast!**

Whatever it is that's freaking you out. The news every single day. Man, you want to be like ticked off and mad and afraid of everything? Just read online or watch on TV or Twitter the news every day. Nonstop. Watch that same channel. You know the one, you know the one, your favorite one!

Or social media that makes you feel left out and horrible about yourself. That one person. Just like, don't look.

Some of you, you're stuck in a YouTube rabbit hole, and you're fighting a battle that only this many people are fighting, and you think the world's coming after you, and you don't even know you're lost in an algorithm that's feeding you the same type of garbage that's just destroying your soul.

For some of you, it's your friends. Every time you're together it's just a hate fest, is to criticize that church, criticize those people, criticize that group, criticize here.

Take a negativity fast and Fill your mind with God's good news!

"Your thoughts have incredible power.  
And you have incredible power over your thoughts."

If you find yourself battling with cynicism, you can say this over and over again

### **Cynicism** (Bible paraphrased)

With God's help, I will get rid of all bitterness and skepticism.  
I choose to believe the best about others  
and be kind, compassionate, and loving.  
I will love and forgive others as Jesus has loved and forgiven me.

If yours is **Negative Filtering** say this:

### **Negative Filtering**

God, by your power, I take every thought captive  
and make it obedient to the truth of Christ.  
Because you are good, I choose to think on what's good,  
right, true, helpful, and worthy of praise.  
As I trust in you, your peace will guard my heart, soul and mind.

If you find yourself lost in absolute thinking, everything's black or white and all these people are this or that, you tell yourself,

### **Absolute Thinking**

As Jesus loved and accepted me, I will love and accept others.  
Rather than always being right, I'm called to always be loving.  
Rather than just making a point, I choose to make a difference.  
In humility, I choose to love others above myself.

And if you find yourself always a victim, always blaming, you just declare this truth

### **Blaming**

God has given me a life and mind of my own.  
By His grace, I will own my choices and choose God's best for me.  
I believe I have been given everything I need  
to accomplish everything God wants me to do today.  
In Christ, by his power, by his blood, by his stripes, by his spirit, I will overcome. I am an  
overcomer by the blood of the lamb and by the words of this testimony.

The mind governed by the flesh is death, is destruction, is darkness, is negativity. Who do you think that's from? Our spiritual enemy, who is the father of lies, who comes to steal, kill and destroy.

But Jesus said, I've come that you may have life and life to the full. The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the spirit is life and joy and peace. So what will you be? swept up by the latest gossip and lowering yourself to the lowest common denominator of popular opinion? Or you're going to stand up for something that brings glory to God? Say we're not a victim of what goes on in the world. I'm going to choose to see where God's working in. I'm going to choose to look for the good in people. I'm going to choose to be loving and kind and full of grace, because your thoughts have incredible power and you have incredible power of your thoughts. And therefore we will not be conformed to the patterns of this world ruled by the princes and powers of darkness. But instead we'll be transformed.

How? By the renewing of our mind, then we can test and prove that the will of God is good, it's perfect and it is pleasing. Remember:

**Your thoughts have incredible power.  
You have incredible power over your thoughts.**