

How You Can 'Think Positive' Even in Negative Circumstances

What's going on in your mind right now? Yes, right this very minute. What has your attention? Are you having a good day or a bad day? If someone asked you, "A penny for your thoughts?", what would you tell them? Do you have a stockpile of good things to think about?

Many years ago I experienced a long period of very severe mental and emotional distress. (A little of my story here.) Among the most important things I learned coming out of that period was that I could choose what to think about.

Abraham Lincoln has been credited with saying, "I've determined that most people are about as happy as they choose to be." I believe that's true.

You know people who are facing horrible circumstances, such as a serious illness, financial loss, betrayal by friends or other tragedy. And yet they display an attitude of courage, resilience and hope.

You know other people who wouldn't know how to have a good day if it came up and "bit" them. Every thought they have, and every word they speak, is negative. Just being around them makes *you* miserable because they are always complaining.

Can You Choose Your Thoughts?

Our thoughts are not all-powerful, but they are much more powerful than we usually give them credit for! Choosing what thoughts to think can go a long way toward making you well or sick, happy or sad, lonely or connected, desperate or satisfied, stuck or making progress.

Many times, I see two patients with the very same medical illness respond very differently. Sure, there are unique physical elements to each case. But the primary difference that determines how well they do comes down to their perspective—their thoughts.

You remember Paul's admonition to "think on these things"—things that are true, noble, good, pure and lovely. (See Phil. 4:8b). You really can choose what to think about!

Choosing what to think about does not mean ignoring reality. Yes, the doctors have given you that diagnosis. Your bank account is overdrawn. That employee stole money from you. Your friend or spouse lied about you. Even the Bible never ignores the horrible things that people experience or do.

But what you do with your mind next makes all the difference!

You can choose where, when and how much time you spend thinking negative thoughts, regardless of your circumstances. Research involving prisoners of war has documented that those who intentionally chose positive thoughts, such as thinking about people at home praying for them or the eventual end of the war, came through their ordeal with significantly better mental/emotional health and resilience.

What to Think About

So what *do* you think about? Look through this list, and choose a few to incorporate into your daily thought process. Intentionally begin each day focusing on something positive. And do the same before you go to sleep at night.

You can think about:

1. Someone who you care about.
2. Someone who cares about you.
3. A challenge you overcame.
4. A goal you have achieved.

5. Some way in which God has blessed you.
6. Something artistic you think is beautiful.
7. An inspiring or beautiful place in nature.
8. An accomplishment you can be proud of.
9. Something you have learned.
10. Someone you have helped.
11. The hope you have in knowing Jesus.
12. Someone who you would like to emulate (be more like).
13. What you believe to be most important in life.
14. A character trait you would like to develop.
15. Something you would love to do.
16. How your life is different because of Jesus.
17. Some way in which you have grown or matured.
18. A time when you felt loved.
19. Something you *do* have a choice about.
20. A time you felt God was close to you.
21. A story of someone who overcame big challenges.
22. A piece of music that lifts your spirits.
23. A Scripture you find meaningful.
24. Something you would like to make better for others.
25. What it feels like to worship God.

Some of these thoughts involve memory. Some involve imagination. Some involve creativity. Some involve faith. All of those are great areas of your heart to draw on in choosing something good to think about.

Before you go to bed tonight, give it a try. Doing so may not solve your problem, but it will sure give you a clearer mental edge in discovering what you can do about it.

Think on these things.

Your turn: What negative thoughts do you struggle with? What positive thought can you go to when you need to? I'd love to hear from you in the comments below. {eo}

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This article originally appeared at .

For more on overcoming negative thoughts, listen to the podcasts included here!