

An interview with Tracie Miles, Author of *Unsinkable Faith: God-Filled Strategies to Transform the Way You Think, Feel, and Live*

Thoughts are powerful and at times cause us to feel and act in ways we wouldn't normally. In fact, they can become so powerful that if left unchecked, they end up controlling us rather than the other way around. When our thoughts and feelings are largely negative in nature, those pessimistic ideas infiltrate our lives — and our faith — making it increasingly difficult to live with joy. In *Unsinkable Faith: God-Filled Strategies to Transform the Way You Think, Feel, and Live* (David C Cook), Tracie Miles offers practical, life-changing strategies for those who struggle with negativity, leading them to discover how the transforming of their minds can transform their lives.



Q: Your new book, *Unsinkable Faith*, opens with details about a difficult conversation you had with Jesus. What led up to that conversation, and how did it lay the foundation for this book?

After almost 26 years of marriage, my husband decided he wasn't happy and chose to leave me and my children. It was as if my whole world fell apart in an instant, and the life I had always known abruptly ended. Anyone who has gone through any type of marital crisis, separation or divorce, long-term relationship breakdown or extremely difficult circumstance knows not only do our thoughts and emotions begin to feel overwhelming and in control, but we can also begin to wonder why God let these circumstances happen to us. Our negative thoughts take over, and we might begin to question our faith and feel abandoned by our heavenly Father. We're hurt, and hurt wreaks havoc on our hearts and minds.

One day a few weeks after my husband left, I finally broke down and cried like a baby for three solid hours, asking Jesus, "Why?" Why did He not answer my prayers to save my marriage and change my husband's heart? Why did my children and I have to go through this? I found myself in fervent prayer like never before when I felt like Jesus whispered a question to my heart. "Do you still love me?" It came out of nowhere, and my immediate answer was, "Yes, Lord." Honestly, my answer caught me off guard, but it was a turning point for me to pick myself up and lean harder into Jesus instead of letting this situation shake my faith. It allowed me to invite Him to help me transform my thoughts from negative into positive to transform and reclaim my life, even if that meant starting over. It wasn't easy — it didn't happen overnight — but it did happen.

Q: Our thoughts can cause us to feel as if we're sinking and can often sink our faith as well. When this happens, how can readers who find themselves feeling as if they're drowning in their problems and negative thoughts learn to stay afloat?

The real question is how can we develop an unsinkable faith that carries us through life with a hopeful, positive attitude no matter what life throws at us? When our thoughts and attitudes get better, our lives can too, even if our circumstances remain the same. We can't always control how we feel, but we can always take authority over our own minds and change the way we think. When we do this, it changes the way we view and experience life overall, preventing us from sinking in hopelessness, discouragement and despair. There is always hope for a positive attitude, a stronger faith, a heart full of joy and a happier future when we put our hope in Jesus and choose not to let life cause us, or our attitudes, to sink. Negative attitudes cause us to sink, while positive ones help us keep our heads above water when life is trying to pull us down. A negative mind will never lead you into a positive life.

Q: How does negativity become a stronghold in our hearts, and what are the consequences?

Negativity usually happens gradually, and sometimes we don't even realize we have become a negative person. It's like a poison that seeps into our hearts and minds so slowly we fail to realize what is happening until it's too late. In our defense, we are all bombarded with outside negative influences every day, from the media, politics and even friends and family. On top of that, if we are going or have gone through some difficult or painful circumstances, our own negative thoughts influence our mind and well-being. Throughout time, negativity can become a stronghold on our entire perspective about everything in life. When this happens, we fall into a habit of thinking negatively so much it simply becomes who we are. The consequences of living with a negative mindset are we lose the ability to look for the good side of things

and always focus on the doom and gloom of any situation, which eventually steals our peace, joy and happiness.

Negative thought patterns will always lead to a negative life pattern. Unfortunately, sometimes the poison even seeps out of our hearts and minds, turns into actions and spills out onto those around us, negatively impacting relationships. It's a vicious cycle, one we can't afford to take lightly. True joy and a positive attitude come from choosing to change your thoughts, not from a problem-free life.

Q: Aren't some people simply "wired" to be more pessimistic or optimistic than others? What encouragement do you offer to those who find it more challenging to think positively?

Every person is unique, but I don't believe some people are wired to be more pessimistic or optimistic. It is true, however, that upbringing, outside influences and circumstances can impact the way people learn to think and train their minds. Science has proven most people are generally optimists. Nobody wants to go around with a doom-and-gloom attitude, but if we aren't careful, life and adversities can cause us to have one.

What's encouraging is it's been proven through amazing brain research by scientists, such as Dr. Daniel Amen and Dr. Carolina Leaf, that science has finally caught up with scripture. It is possible to transform our brain physically through positive thinking physiologically, but we can also transform our thought patterns by asking God to help us be more aware of negative thoughts when they creep in and turn those thoughts around. Their research has proven this to be true time and time again with their patients. Everyone is capable of changing their thought patterns, and when they do their lives will change too.

Q: What type of person will benefit from reading *Unsinkable Faith*?

Not one person is alive who doesn't feel overwhelmed with negative thoughts from time to time, whether due to a painful memory of the past or a current challenge. Every one of us will start feeling bossed around by our feelings, as if we don't have control of our emotions and actions. However, deep down we desperately want to gain control again, so it's a topic everyone can benefit from.

More specifically, it may benefit those who:

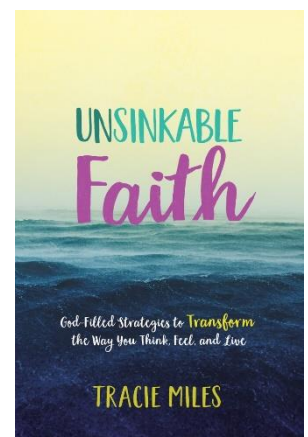
- have convinced themselves they're doomed to be unhappy and have just accepted it because they know their circumstances will never change.
- grew up in a pessimistic home and think they are fated to carry on that negative legacy.
- struggle with depression and discouragement and feel true happiness and optimism are entirely out of reach because they've tried other methods and medications to help them feel happy, but they just haven't worked.
- are generally positive people but are going through a difficult situation, such as myself.

Anyone who wants to be a more happy, optimistic person — regardless of the root cause of their negativity — can benefit from learning how to reshape their thoughts, transform their minds and begin steering their life in a more positive direction.

Q: You write, "We can't always control how we feel, but we can always take authority over our own minds and change the way we think." How do we balance working to change the way we think with allowing the Holy Spirit to transform us?

We all know feelings are powerful and at times cause us to think or even do things we wouldn't normally do. In fact, sometimes our thoughts are so powerful they are controlling us rather than us controlling them, and that's never good.

Romans 12:2 (The Message) says, "Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think." This verse is telling us not to let the world or our circumstances conform our thoughts, but to let the Holy Spirit transform us instead. The balance comes in realizing we can't change our minds without the help of Christ and an intentional decision to do so. Being conformed is what happens to us when external influences impact us internally, but being transformed happens when we choose intentionally to ask the Holy Spirit to shape us and our thoughts instead.



We must first have the desire and willingness to change. Then, we need to ask the Holy Spirit to help us be more aware of each negative thought that cause us to feel pessimistic, fearful, mad, sad and overwhelmed. From there we need to rephrase those thoughts into something positive or, at a minimum, stop listening to the negative thoughts when they arise and reject them completely. As our awareness of our thoughts grows, a transformation begins to happen.

Q: What are some of the “God-tools” available to help us fight for control of our thoughts and emotions?

Second Corinthians 10:4 (The Message) says, “We use our powerful God-tools for smashing warped philosophies, tearing down barriers erected against the truth of God, fitting every loose thought and emotion and impulse into the structure of life shaped by Christ.” These God-tools are within our grasp to fight the spiritual war taking place in our minds. These tools are God's Word, prayer, the prayers of others on our behalf, holy strength we can tap into, the ability to persevere, peace even when life isn't peaceful and worship. All of these things equip us to push back against warped philosophies and the lies in our minds that do not line up with God's Word.

Satan's tactics don't stand a chance against God's power, but until we intentionally decide to use those tools to fight for control over our own thoughts and emotions, he will continue to have the upper hand in this battlefield of the mind.

Q: A strong theme throughout *Unsinkable Faith* is surrendering our fears and negative thoughts to the Lord. Is this something we can just do once, or is it an ongoing process?

If only it were that easy! In every difficult circumstance I face, I usually catch myself thinking something negative again. That's simply human nature and the power of emotion. However, as God walked me through the journey of mind transformation, especially in the writing this book, I began to form a habit of noticing negative thoughts when they occurred and immediately trying to reject those thoughts, replacing them with something positive and more true.

For the whole year after my separation, I had to go back to God time and time again to ask for His help in controlling my thoughts. I would do good for a while, but then another problem or emotional situation would rage in, and my thoughts would plummet into negativity yet again. Thankfully, God is gracious to forgive us when we stumble, and He knows we are just human beings trying to survive in this badly broken world where it's often challenging to think positively. The transforming of our minds is a process where we'll never fully “arrive,” but when we commit to change and practice changing how we think day in and day out, we soon notice our lives are changing for the better. We become happier and more at peace than ever before. It's a journey, but every step of the journey is worth it.

Q: Through what process does what we think become who we are?

Scripture talks about this. Proverbs 23:7 says, “For as he thinks in his heart, so is he.” This simply means whatever we think about internally will have an impact on who we are, who we become and how we live our lives. Our internal thoughts drive everything we say and usually dictate our outward actions. What we think about becomes who we are.

I think many of us are under the impression it doesn't matter what we think because nobody can hear those thoughts unless we say them aloud. However, our thoughts are literally what control our lives. Choosing to be the captain of our thoughts and transforming our minds to be generally optimistic becomes the determining factor not only on what kind of person we are, but how other people see us.

Q: While our thoughts dictate our feelings, which in turn dictate our actions, how do we cross over and begin living by faith rather than feelings?

The transformation must begin with prayer and surrendering ourselves to God. Of course, using the God-tools we talked about earlier will equip us for the journey. Living by faith instead of feelings is difficult, so that's why it's important to make our faith a priority.

Q: How do our thinking patterns actually change the physical function and structure of our brains?

Dr. Caroline Leaf, a cognitive neuroscientist with a PhD in communication pathology, wrote a popular book titled *Switch On Your Brain*. In it she reveals that because we are constantly reacting to circumstances and events, our brains become shaped by the process of thoughts and reactions. If we think positively, the

physiological aspects of our brains change in healthy ways that help us move toward a positive quality of life. Yet if we think negatively, our brains are changed in unhealthy ways, causing us to feel and act negatively and steering us toward a more negative quality of life.

Leaf also found people who regularly meditate on Scripture and have developed a disciplined and focused thought-life have increased intelligence, wisdom and a feeling of peace. I love how this research supports what we are told in Scripture repeatedly: We can transform and renew our minds if we choose to (Romans 12:2). For all who struggle with negativity, pessimism and even depression, this is good news! Although in many cases there are physiological reasons for depression (and therefore medication is beneficial and necessary), sometimes depression can be minimized when positive thinking becomes the norm instead of the exception.

Q: What advice can you offer the person living in so much hurt their vision is too clouded to see Jesus?

Life is hard for everyone, but it is harder for some than others. However, none of us have to let the hardships of life harden our hearts and minds. Emotional pain is one of the strongest emotions there is, and it can not only cloud our thinking but also our faith. It's often the misconceptions we build in our minds rather than our circumstances that cloud our ability to see Jesus. I would tell them even though they may have a million valid reasons to feel negative or pessimistic, all those negative thoughts will never lead to a positive life.

All of us want to be happy, fulfilled and optimistic about the future. We all have had pain in our past or are facing difficult situations that are hard to be optimistic about, but all things are possible in Christ. Every believer has the power to choose optimism and doing so is life-changing.

Q: How is choosing joy, no matter what, different from a "Fake it 'til you make it" mindset?

There are days when we are just not going to feel happy. Nobody can be happy every second of every day; it's just not realistic. I do believe, however, you can choose joy every day. It will take some effort, but it is possible. We can't just pretend our problems don't exist or deny our feelings when we're hurt or upset, essentially putting on a fake smile. But when we ask God to help us purposely focus on having a glass-half-full mentality, we start feeling more uplifted. It's truly amazing what can happen when we invite God to change our hearts and minds and, in turn, our lives. Happiness and joy truly are a choice. We don't have to live a joyless life unless we choose to do so. Circumstances don't determine our joy; our faith and outlook do.

Q: You offer practical ideas at the end of each chapter, including journaling topics, actions steps and Bible verses for meditation. How vital are these steps to making lasting changes in how we think?

We can read infinite amounts of information about how to do new things or learn to improve on something, but if we don't apply those tips to our lives and put them into practice, we'll never achieve success. Just like anything new we set out to learn or master, we have to apply what we learn to everyday life practically. That's why I included many practical tips, opportunities for personal reflections and ways to apply the book to their own life, complete with biblical backup. Each chapter also includes a powerful challenge to the readers to help them really jumpstart their new lives.

Q: What other resources are available to go along with *Unsinkable Faith*?

I have a wonderful study guide that accompanies the book and includes all of the challenges, reflections and chapter activities from the book, but also includes bonus challenges so readers can take their quest for optimism even further. The guide offers more room for writing and journaling thoughts and prayers. There's a really fun activity for each chapter with background information about the famous people who wrote the quotes used in the book. They were all wonderful role models for positive thinkers who overcame adversity and allowed God to transform their minds and their lives. These bonus activities help the reader delve deep into their own thought patterns and feel encouraged that they too can change.

I also have a free 5 Day Optimist Challenge readers can sign up for on my blog, www.traciemiles.com. The challenge will get them started on the right foot in their own personal journeys toward living lives of optimism. There are lots of other resources available on my blog as well.

Learn more about Tracie Miles and *Unsinkable Faith* at www.traciemiles.com, on [Facebook](#) ([p31traciemiles](#)) and via [Twitter](#) ([@traciewmiles](#)).