

## PART 34 – FEELING TRAPPED?

### ❖ DO YOU KNOW WHAT A DEATH SPIRAL IS?

*I am not much on ice skating simply because I am as clumsy as an elephant in a china shop when it comes to ice skating. However, I always enjoyed watching a couple in the Olympics do a death spiral where the male partner spins the female partner with one hand in a wide circle with both her body and head almost touching the ground. In aviation, a death spiral is just that. It is when the pilot finds his plane spinning towards the ground in a cork screw pattern. It almost always leads to a crash. Insurance companies have death spirals in their policies, financial institutions can find themselves in a death spiral, and in reality, many people are living in what we could call a personal death spiral. In simple terms related to everyday life, a death spiral is any situation in which you may find yourself that is brought about by a series of events or decisions or actions which you have made that ultimately lead you to a point of moral ruin, or maybe a mental/physical breakdown, or a financial collapse from spending more than you made and completely mismanaging what you had. It could just be a complete collapse of your life. The drug addict or the alcoholic would be good examples of people who just keeping making one bad decision after another and when all is said and done, their whole life has been ruined.*

Do you know how easy it is to make bad decisions? In my mind, for many people it is actually easier and more enticing to make bad decisions rather than good decisions. It could be things like spending money for things you do not need with money you do not have, or deciding you can be a social drinker, or thinking you have no need to attend church regularly. [Proverbs 1:7](#) says,

**Prov 1:7 (NKJV) The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.**

[Proverbs 14:16](#) says much the same thing,

**Prov 14:16 (NKJV) A wise man fears and departs from evil, but a fool rages and is self-confident.**

In [Matthew 23](#), Jesus said that the most religious men on the planet were “fools and blind”. In [Luke 12:20](#), God told a man who trusted in his riches that he was a fool and that that very night that his soul would be required of him. Foolish men are constantly making foolish and selfish decisions simply because they have never learned how to think like God thinks.

Unfortunately, Christians can easily find themselves in a kind of mental death spiral when it comes to how they think – and not even know it. It could be anything. Let me provide you with a very short list of the kind of thinking patterns that pervade so many people’s lives, but each one has the potential of putting your life into a tail spin, into a death spiral. Trust me, but it does not take much for this to happen.

1. Developing bad habits
2. Having a negative attitude
3. Becoming anxious about almost anything
4. Having a bitter and unforgiving spirit
5. Using condescending words
6. Having a severe drug or drinking problem

7. An unwillingness to change what needs to be changed
8. Blaming others for everything that is wrong
9. Becoming angry at the least little thing possible
10. Complaining all the time
11. An uncontrollable tongue, and
12. Anything else that may ail people.

The problem is really very simple - most everyone thinks like they want to think, and to be quite honest, they are not interested in someone else telling them how they should think. If they want to use condescending words, they will. If they want to take drugs, they will. If they want to complain about everything, they will. It is not only a bad choice on their part, but it is really bad thinking. The problem is simple: Bad thinking leads to bad results.

Everyone knows the proverbial response to all of this – *“You believe what you want to believe, and I will believe what I want to believe.”* I think we could easily add to that *“You think how you want to think, and I will think how I want to think.”* Honestly, both of those comments are fairly naïve and will eventually become very debilitating to the person who thinks that way. If what you believe or think right now is unbiblical, you are in a lose / lose scenario, and probably have no idea that you are. You may be headed in the direction that you want and doing what you want to do, but if your thinking is wrong and not in alignment with God’s Word, you can trust me that your destination will not be what you expected.

**KEY PRINCIPLE 119: THE END RESULT OF BAD THINKING IS ALWAYS BAD RESULTS.**

No one is free from destructive patterns created because of how and what they think. Some people’s glass is half full and the guy beside them has a glass that is half empty. Your perspective controls so much of how you see life and so much of how you respond to life. Most people, even many Christians, have a very worldly perspective, and so their life is always headed in a worldly or godless direction – and they simply do not know it. Honestly, they know all of the verses about being worldly, or on leaving God out of their life, or on living how they want to live, or on what it really means to be a disciple, but it makes no difference to them. It is just bad thinking that will lead to bad choices that will lead to bad consequences. David decided he wanted another man’s wife. Jonah decided he was not going to do what God wanted him to do. Lot decided he would live in Sodom where the grass was greener. I wonder how things turned out for those men?

So, it is important that if any of these “thinking patterns”, or any similar patterns, may apply to you personally, then you need to make what I want to call a “**mind shift**”. Here is what I want you to do.

**Think of thoughts as direction.**

Consider your thinking as what creates the direction of your life. [Romans 8:6](#) is a very important verse.

**Rom 8:6 (NKJV) For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.**

You have to decide what you are going to think about and how you are going to think. God will NOT make this decision for you. You choose. You make the decision. There is no arm twisting with God.

You will choose to think one way or the other – carnally or spiritually. One will not give you the results you want, the other will. So, the decision that you have to make is literally a life and death kind of decision. I have mentioned this previously, but...

**You are always headed in the direction of what you are thinking AND you are always becoming what you are thinking.**

So, the kind of “**primary mindset**” that you have, and you do have one that is either spiritual or carnal, is a very important part of your personality.<sup>1</sup> It has much to do with your character, with what interests you, with how you behave, with what your speech is like, and with how you relate to people. The good news and takeaway from this series is that if you have a negative, carnal, unbiblical mindset that you can actually change it. Amen and Hallelujah! You can have a “**mind shift**”. You can literally change the direction that your wrong thoughts are taking you. Change your thinking, change your life – right?

Let us just think about this for a moment. For instance, how do you see failure? Is it always bad to you? In my mind, **failure is actually more important than success because failure is what God uses to grow a believer.**

**Your actual mindset on any issue or problem of your life can change what you may be seeing as negative into something very positive.**

Failing never means that you are a failure. It could just as easily mean that you are a spiritual fighter, a spiritual warrior. **You only fail when you quit learning from your failures.** When you fail spiritually, it should be a wake-up call and a spiritual motivation to work harder at what God wants you to become. Just because I had to, I figured out a long time ago that if I wanted to be a spiritually wise person that I had to surround my life with people that were spiritually wiser and smarter than me. They were able to help me in my failures because God had worked deeply in their life when they had failed – and they just passed along God’s wisdom to me.

Just think of how Jesus saw the cross. It was going to be much more than just painful, but His mindset was not going to be deterred by what it would be temporarily. He focused on what it would mean eternally. [Hebrews 12:2](#) says,

Heb 12:2 (NKJV) **looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.**

Nothing is easy and just automatically happens in the Christian life. The Christian life requires great effort and it always has great struggles. Great success always requires great effort. Just think about something like marriage for a moment. One researcher said it like this:

*“Every marriage demands an effort to keep it on the right track; there is a constant tension...between the forces that hold you together and those that can tear you apart.”<sup>2</sup>*

In some ways, that describes exactly what the Christian life is about – understanding the tensions that help us to stay close to God and those that try to tear us away from God.

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<sup>1</sup> Dweck, 46.

<sup>2</sup> Dweck, 153.

Let us just assume that you are someone who fits into one or more of the categories that were previously listed. Then to make it worse, you are that someone who has very little hope that anything is ever going to change. The result of that kind of thinking is that you become discouraged and maybe even depressed. You feel helpless. It is like you feel trapped in life, trapped in your circumstances, and unable to do anything about either. So, what is it that often happens when you feel trapped? Well, you begin to make bad decisions. **You think wrong and your wrong thoughts drive you in the wrong direction.** Eventually you become comfortable in being unbiblical in your choices. You become unwilling to allow God to change how you are thinking. So, your life just keeps going along in the wrong direction and you have no real intention of changing that direction. We all are aware of the reality that if you think like a victim, then you will become a victim. On the other hand, if you think and believe that by the power of Christ that you can become an overcomer, then you will become an overcomer. **Your life is always moving in the direction of your strongest thoughts.**<sup>3</sup> Listen carefully.

**If you dwell on your problems, they will overwhelm you, but if you dwell on God's solutions to your problems, they will strengthen you to be an overcomer over those problems.**<sup>4</sup>

I hope you understand that the unfortunate reality of living in a fallen world is that everyone has problems. **You have never met someone who did not have some problems.** Your marriage partner has problems, your co-worker has problems, the person sitting beside you in the church pew has problems, the guy driving in front of you on the road has problems, your children have problems, your pastor has problems, your best friend has problems, your parents have problems. I do not know one person who does not have any problems. The problems come in all shapes and sizes. They can be emotional, physical, relational, mental, work related, family related, and / or school related. The list is endless. However, the major problem why you are often defeated spiritually is because somewhere along the way you bought into the lies of the enemy hook, line, and sinker. If you believe Satan's lies, then it is like opening your home and letting a thief come in and steal everything you own.

**KEY PRINCIPLE 120: WHAT YOU THINK ABOUT YOUR PROBLEMS WILL GREATLY IMPACT WHAT YOU DO ABOUT YOUR PROBLEMS.**

**No one gets an exemption from the results and consequences of how they use their mind or how they think.**

You may think that you are the exception, but that is just another lie you have believed. Your life is always moving in the direction of your strongest thoughts, and those thoughts can be either godly or ungodly, good or bad, right or wrong. I know that someone is going to immediately think to themselves

*“Yea, Gary that sounds real spiritual, but the problem is that you have no idea what I have had to live through. If you only knew, then you would never say that to me.”*

Sure, I know what you may be living through. Listen, I will trade you my ongoing battle with cancer for your problems. How about that for a fair trade? Even Jesus Himself was tempted in all points just as we have been tempted. He was no stranger to problems. He told those who wanted to follow Him

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<sup>3</sup> Groeschel, *Winning*, 1.

<sup>4</sup> Groeschel, *Winning*, 20-21.

that He had nowhere to even lay His head. He did not even have enough money to pay His taxes and had to send someone fishing to get some money. Everywhere He went people wanted to kill Him. People mocked Him and would ask Him to leave their city when He said something they did not like or healed some demon possessed man hiding in a cave. He never told a lie, but was always lied about. They tried to push Him off the side of a mountain. He was spit on and beaten. How about all of that for godly living?

So, when someone makes a statement that I have no idea what they may be going through, immediately a statement like that reveals to me how that person has been thinking. Their unpleasant and unfortunate circumstances have given them a perspective that has created a kind of negative mental stronghold that is controlling their life. They have been molded and influenced by something negative in their life rather than molded and influenced by something positive and godly in their life. In reality, they have accepted the lies of the devil rather than believing the truth of God's Word. Listen to what Paul said in [Philippians 4:11-13](#),

**Php 4:11 (NKJV) Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content:<sup>12</sup> I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.<sup>13</sup> I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.**

Do you know what Paul was doing? He was believing the truth of God more than the lies of the devil. Do you know where Paul was when he wrote Philippians? He was in jail in Rome, but he refused to allow his circumstances to overrule the goodness and power of God working in his life. In America, we have become experts at succumbing to every struggle that confronts us rather than seeing God's hand in everything that may happen to us. Many of our struggles are probably self-inflicted, but many of them have been divinely designed just for us. Our culture has created "millennials" who think that they are entitled to whatever they want. Where did that come from? It comes from bad thinking, from ungodly thinking. Paul was not sitting around in prison thinking about what a bad deal God had given to him – not at all. He understood that Christ would strengthen him in everything that was happening to him, and he was completely content with that reality. Listen carefully.

**You have to understand that in many cases that God has initiated your struggles, and He does so to help you make some necessary changes in your character and disposition.**

You will never change what you do not want to change, so when that happens your unwillingness to allow God to work deeply in your life forces Him to create some struggles for you and bring some difficult people and circumstances into your life. Listen. **The sooner that you allow God to change your character through your circumstances, the sooner God is able to change your circumstances.** However, the more that you focus on and complain about your negative circumstances, the more you will miss God's best for your life. We actually train our brains to be miserable. We create a neural pathway for misery by always resisting what God wants to change.

**KEY PRINCIPLE 121: YOU SHOULD ALWAYS BE LOOKING FOR THE GOODNESS OF GOD IN EVERYTHING THAT HAPPENS IN YOUR LIFE.**

That was exactly what Paul did and it is exactly what you should do. That should always be your focus - to find God's goodness and see God's hand in every circumstance of your life – always, every day. This one principle has changed my life in a way that I cannot describe. I am convinced that God is always working in every area of my life, so I want to find out what He is wanting to produce in me through my struggles and problems. If you fail to see God's sovereign hand in your life, you will always be struggling with everyone and everything. You will rarely find any relief simply because anything difficult will be perceived as being bad. Every problematic person and every difficult issue will be seen from your perspective and not God's perspective.

The truth is that God is never caught by surprise by difficult people or by difficult circumstances in your life, and His ability to help you through those trying moments are much greater than you normally give Him credit for in your life. So very often the struggles you face have been both initiated and allowed by God to change you into His image, but you may be so prone to “**kick against the goads**” when things do not go your way that you fail to see His sovereign hand in your life, and you actually miss God's best for your life. It is extremely easy to become a very impatient person when it comes to spiritual growth.

One of the problems is that many people simply fail to realize that their thoughts are always driving them down a certain path. One of the continuing goals of this study is to help you change the direction that your wrong thoughts are taking you. If you were driving somewhere and suddenly realized that you were headed in the wrong direction, most likely you would figure out what you would have to do to get headed back in the right direction. In like manner, if you know that something in your life is headed in the wrong direction, then you have to get turned around, but it will do you well to first determine why you are actually headed in the wrong direction. Generally, it is because your life is just following your thinking. Your life becomes a visual blueprint of what you are thinking. So, if you will be willing to change your thinking, then you will be able to change the trajectory of your life.

#### ❖ IS THIS A TRAP?

Many people who are struggling in a particular area of their life believe that they are actually trapped with no way out. Well, that is always a lie that most people have believed and allowed to literally “trap” them mentally. When they believe there is no way out, that is when they begin to develop their own plans to get out of their so-called trap. The truth of God's Word, however, reveals something very different.

**KEY PRINCIPLE 122: WHEN YOU ALLOW GOD TO BECOME YOUR LIFE, THERE IS NOTHING THAT CAN TRAP YOU.**

You must believe that simple truth. It will free you from the fears and anxieties of having no way out of some difficult circumstance in your life. God is greater than any difficult circumstance that you face, and He will provide you with the wisdom you need to win the struggle you are facing. You must remember that His ways will not be your way. His solution may almost seem contradictory to what you are expecting. He backed Moses up to Red Sea with no way out. The people felt trapped and they felt afraid, but then God did what only He could do. When God is your life, there is nothing that can trap you. You have nothing to fear except not trusting Him with your life.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

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