

# UNSINKABLE Faith

*God-Filled Strategies to Transform  
the Way You Think, Feel, and Live*

TRACIE MILES

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*transforming lives together*

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*Without these three people in my life, I wouldn't be who I am today. They help me stay positive, even when my thoughts try to pull me down, and they always give me a reason to smile. Morgan, Kaitlyn, and Michael—you are the lights of my life. To say I am thankful that God so immensely blessed me with the privilege of being your mom, and now the privilege of having you as my best friends, would be an understatement. I'm so proud of each of you and the amazing people you have grown into. I dedicate this book to you, not only because you stood by my side as my biggest supporters while it was being written, but because you are without a doubt the most beautiful, positive blessings I am eternally grateful for.*



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# PROLOGUE

Have you ever wondered what life might be like if you had a more optimistic attitude despite your past, present, or future circumstances? At a very young age, Margaret Tobin somehow decided that was exactly how she was going to live her life. Born in 1867, she endured a meager upbringing in a tiny, dirty two-room cottage on the banks of the Mississippi River in Missouri. “Maggie” was a scrappy, foul-mouthed tomboy who couldn’t read or write but set her mind to becoming successful, refusing to let anything stand in her way.

At the age of eighteen, she moved to a small town in Colorado, and after years of perseverance, she eventually grew to be a popular American socialite, philanthropist, and activist for many great causes, such as women’s rights and child literacy. She became well known for her many accomplishments. She was devout in her faith, which helped her attitude stay positive no matter how many hardships she faced, including the time she was on a ship that hit a large iceberg and began to sink.

When she realized what was happening, Maggie helped countless fellow passengers board the life rafts before she would get into

one herself. Then later, wet and shivering in a life raft in the dark, cold sea in the middle of the night, and hearing the cries of those perishing off in the distance, she exhorted the crew on her raft to return to the capsizing vessel and look for additional survivors. She even took the oars into her own hands and helped row the raft back to the scene of the disaster. She encouraged the others in her boat not to give up hope, to work together, and to continue rowing until help was in sight.

Maggie not only survived the *Titanic* tragedy, she also helped others who had been rescued and even established a committee that raised nearly \$10,000 for the survivors. She spent countless hours trying to contact families of passengers via telegraph, and she cared for survivors with food and blankets.

Her life was so inspiring, the press gave her a nickname of Molly, and soon a famous 1960 Broadway musical was created called *The Unsinkable Molly Brown*, which was also adapted into a movie in 1964 (Brown being her married name). The first scene of the movie sums up Molly's entire attitude. We see Molly's big brothers pestering her, yet again, and wrestling her to the ground, refusing to let her up until she hollered "Uncle." With all of their weight bearing down against her small frame, it was hard for her to break free, but that didn't stop her from fighting for victory. With dirt and feet flailing everywhere, their frenzied conversation in the midst of the brawl went like this:

Brothers: "You're tuckered out, Molly! Why don't you quit?"



Molly (gasping for breath, with dirt in her mouth and eyes): “Sure I’m tuckered, and I might give out, but I won’t give in! Nobody wants me down like I wants me up!”

Brothers continue to laugh and roughly wrestle her into the dirt, twisting her up like a pretzel.

Molly: “Now look-a-here, I am important to me! I ain’t no bottom to no pile! I mean much more to me than anybody I ever knew! It doesn’t make a bit of difference for you to keep telling me I’m down until I say so too! I hate that word, *down*, but I love the word *up* because that means hope; and that’s just what I got. Hope.”

Don’t you just love that? Molly might have felt down or overcome, in fact physically she was both of those things. Yet mentally and emotionally, she refused to give in.

She was unsinkable.

How different would our lives look if we were as determined to have the unsinkable optimism and faith that Molly Brown had? What if we learned to start thinking more like her when we’re faced with reasons to be negative or when we’re feeling overpowered or beaten down by life, instead of always focusing on our problems and circumstances and letting them steal our peace, joy, and hope?

What if we refused to get *down* and put forth intentional effort into always being *up*, no matter what storms rage in our lives? How much more hopeful and joyful could we feel? How might our lives change if we acknowledge how important we are to Christ and start thinking of ourselves as people of utmost importance and value who don't deserve anything less than happy, joy-filled, peace-full lives? People who never belong on the bottom of a pile?

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?

Hop on board, my friend, because we are getting ready to take a journey to the land of optimism. If you've been sinking under the weight of negative thoughts, emotions, or circumstances for far too long, I have good news. There is a lighthouse off in the distance, gently waiting to lead you into calmer waters. And along the way, you're going to discover how to develop a positive mind, which leads to a more positive life, and how you too can have unsinkable faith.



*Happiness is a state of mind.  
It's just according to how you look at things.*

Walt Disney



*Chapter One*

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# YOUR FEELINGS AREN'T THE BOSS OF YOU

## *When You Feel Like You're Sinking*

*When negative thoughts are controlling us, there is hope. When we learn to change the way we think, we can change the way we feel.*

Life as I knew it had ended. And I had a choice to make. Either I could let my circumstances dictate my joy and happiness going forward, or I could intentionally choose to be positive and refuse to sink under the weight of negativity. That may have been the most important decision I've ever faced.

After nearly twenty-six years of marriage, my husband and I separated. The heartache and devastation were overwhelming, and I spent the first few months after he left in a puddle of tears and negative thoughts every day.

My vision of what the future was supposed to look like was wiped away in an instant, and my losses seemed to keep piling up. My fears about the uncertain future seemed innumerable, and I

was consumed with worry for my children and how their parents' separation might affect their hearts. With each passing day, I felt the toxicity of negativity, hopelessness, fear, and pessimism seeping deeper and deeper into my heart. I felt as if I were stuck in a whirlpool, slowly being pulled under by the weight of my thoughts, yet desperately longing to be free and happy again. A tsunami had slammed into my reality, and as hard as I tried, I couldn't stop sinking into sadness and, at times, even felt I was struggling with depression.

But the day finally came, several months later, when my emotional and mental exhaustion seemed overwhelming, and I realized I was fed up with feeling sad and hopeless. I was tired of assuming the future couldn't be bright simply because the present was difficult. I knew that I needed to be a role model for my children and that my attitude would permeate theirs—either positively or negatively. I also knew that I needed to put my hope in God, trusting that not only was He able to heal broken hearts and broken relationships but also that, no matter what, I could have peace and joy if I intentionally invited Him to help me with my thoughts.

I realized I didn't want to spend my life being bitter and negative and stuck in pessimism, whether because of the current situation, hard circumstances that lay ahead, or simply the small struggles and frustrations of everyday life.

I certainly did not want to be the kind of person who always saw the glass half-empty instead of half-full and inadvertently overlooked her blessings because of the negative or bitter blinders on her heart. I had never been that type of person before, and in a

moment with the One who holds all hope, I became determined I was never going to be.

## *My Conversation with Jesus That Changed Everything*

I got on my knees and had a long conversation with Jesus, full of honest questions, anger, pleas, and tears. Then I sensed His voice whispering a gentle question to my spiritual ears, and my immediate answer caught me off guard. “Will you still love Me, Tracie?”

My answer, without hesitating, was “I still love You, Lord.” I surprised myself with my response, but hearing my own heartfelt words brought comfort to my soul. Realizing I loved Jesus, despite what He had allowed in my life, gave me a renewed sense of hope. Not only in Him but also in myself. I knew it would not be easy, but I grabbed hold of the hope, peace, and reassurance He was offering and committed to holding on as tightly as I could.

As His peace washed over me, I knew that despite my circumstances and hardships, living a life of joy and positive thinking was within my reach, and that the first step of the journey had to be taken inside my own head. I had no control over my circumstances, but I could take control over my thoughts about them. I knew I needed to begin shifting my thoughts so that they didn't control my life.

My heart lightened when I surrendered my negativity and committed to trusting God through this storm. I realized optimism and positive thinking were still within my reach because I had the power within me through Christ to choose to be positive,

despite my circumstances. I merely had to make an intentional effort to do so. And when I did, my whole perspective and outlook completely changed. My circumstances stayed the same, but over time, my thoughts and my heart did not.

## *Changing Our Perspectives, Regardless*

I share this raw, personal pain with you only because I want you to know that I know what it's like to feel justified in living with a negative mind-set. I know what it's like to be upset with the situations God has either caused or allowed in our lives, and maybe even feel a little angry at Him. I know what it's like to desperately want situations to be different but to feel powerless to change them. And I know what it's like to long to be happy again and break free from the shackles of pain, heartache, and disappointment that pull down our spirits. But I also know what it's like to experience freedom from chronic negativity, and I want you to experience that too.

Today your situation and what pains your heart might be entirely different from what I've experienced. Or, maybe what I've described seems all too familiar. Friend, no matter what it is that might be draining your joy and robbing you of optimism, I know you must be struggling if you're reading a book to help you transform your mind so you can foster an unsinkable faith in your heart.

Maybe you want to be more positive but don't know how to change and are struggling to break free from the bondage of

pessimism. Maybe you've convinced yourself you're doomed to be unhappy and negative because it seems your circumstances may never change and people have hurt you, physically or emotionally. Maybe you feel you don't deserve happiness because of mistakes you made in the past or because of patterns of sin or addictions in your life that you can't seem to break, making you feel like a failure time and time again. Or perhaps you've been battling depression and discouragement for so long, it seems impossible to ever overcome them. Maybe you feel as though you're drowning in a myriad of problems, barely able to keep your head above water in the storms of your life.

If any of these descriptions fit you, sweet friend, my heart goes out to you. I know those feelings all too well—been there, done that, and bought the T-shirt. More than once. But I've also learned that 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, which then changes the way we view and experience life overall.

When it feels like an overwhelming riptide of circumstances is causing us to sink, sometimes our faith and our attitudes are at risk of going down too. We feel like we just don't have the energy to keep fighting, and it becomes easier and easier to lose any hope that we'll ever make it safely to shore. But there is always hope—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. Even if we feel as though



we're ready to give out, we don't have to give in to hopelessness and pessimism. If there is one thing for sure, it's that a negative mind will never lead you into a more positive life.

Regardless of where you find yourself today or how you're feeling, I want you to know that I get it. Not only because of my current trials but also because of many other difficulties I've experienced throughout my lifetime.

### *You Can Choose Life*

We always have the power within us to choose how we think about our circumstances and our lives overall, despite what's going on. As believers we are all equipped to have hope when things seem hopeless, enabled to embrace joy when situations seem joyless, and empowered by the Holy Spirit within us to overcome the life-robbing habit of negative thinking.

We can learn to change our perspectives about our circumstances, even if our circumstances don't change. You see, when we learn to change the way we think, we can change the way we feel, which gradually transforms our minds to be more like Christ's, which then, in turn, changes the way we live, making our lives more positive. A changed mind will always result in a changed heart. A life of optimism and joy is possible for all of us, no matter what we're going through. After all, hearts anchored in God don't sink.

The encounter I had with Jesus when praying about my marriage was a game changer.

I am in no way saying making the choice to focus on the positive was easy—oh, friend, it was so not easy. Actually, it might have been the hardest thing I've ever had to do, especially in the midst of overwhelming heartache and disappointment. But deep in my spirit I knew that negativity could all too easily become a stronghold in my heart, my mind, and my life, and I also knew I could not let that happen.

Just because something bad had happened in my life didn't mean my life was bad, and just because I was unhappy in the moment didn't mean I had to live an unhappy life.

## *The Stronghold of Negativity*

I didn't have to let negativity become a stronghold in my heart, and neither do you. I chose to try to be positive as much as possible and not to be held hostage to pessimism and bitterness. My prayer is that you will choose to do the same.

A stronghold is anything that holds us back from living life the way God intended and hinders our ability to live with optimism and full of peace, love, joy, and hope. When it comes to the term *stronghold*, people typically think of the obvious issues, such as sins, lying, stealing, worry, addictions, and so on. Yet all too often, it is our negative attitude that becomes a stronghold and keeps us from living a joy-filled life, not necessarily the external factors that influenced our attitude.

If a majority of our thoughts are negative, that “strong hold” of negativity can slowly choke out our happiness and keep us

paralyzed in the land of pessimism, while we may live completely unaware this is happening. We may resort to blaming other people for the way we are feeling, struggling with fears, harboring anger, or assuming that God cannot love us or forgive us. We may assume He cares for everyone else, but not for us. We assume that no one else on the planet has ever gone through what we are going through and that nobody else could possibly relate.

We find ourselves not thinking Christlike thoughts, allowing fear and worry to run rampant in our hearts, letting the ups and downs of everyday life overwhelm us, or just mentally beating ourselves up for past mistakes or regrets. We might even justify our pessimism and negativity because we feel like a victim of others or of life. This hidden, inadvertent negativity can have a powerful impact on our lives. Our negative thoughts, if we ignore them, will dictate our feelings, and our feelings will dictate our actions. Thus, our unpleasant thoughts hold us hostage and have a “strong hold” on our outlook on life, our peace, and our joy.

Then one day we wake up and realize we are sinking in a pit of pessimism or anger or frustration, bitter about our circumstances, irritated at the smallest things, addicted to complaining and grumpiness, lacking peace and joy, snapping at our loved ones, and overall being discontent and unsatisfied with our lives and the people in it. If you ask me, the only thing worse than realizing we have become a full-blown pessimist is becoming one and never realizing it.

Fortunately, we each have the power within us as believers to fight this invisible battle for our thoughts. Second Corinthians

10:4 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” (THE MESSAGE). We have plenty of “God-tools” within our grasp to fight this spiritual war that takes place in our minds. We have God’s Word, prayer, the prayers of others on our behalf, holy strength, perseverance, divine peace, and our faith walk, all of which equip us to push back against warped philosophies and our own minds’ lies that do not line up with God’s Word.

Although it’s never easy to reshape our thoughts, especially when life feels hard, we can ask Christ to help us use those tools He has given us to chisel away at our negativity and lack of faith and to restructure our hearts, our minds, and ultimately our lives to be more like His. Satan’s weapons don’t stand a chance against God’s power, but until we decide to pick up those God-tools, our spiritual weapons, and fight for control of our thoughts and emotions, he will continue to win the battle in our minds.

### *A Winnable Battle*

We all know life can be hard. People hurt us, the past haunts us, coworkers mistreat us, parents don’t love us, friends don’t consider us, spouses don’t honor us, children don’t appreciate or respect us, finances don’t support us, and our health doesn’t sustain us. And when life gets hard, having a positive outlook and an optimistic attitude of joy can seem impossible to attain. But the apostle James

tells us otherwise: “Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy” (1:2). We find this verse tucked within the story where the Christians of that time had allowed the frustrations and annoyances of life to steal their optimism and joy.

In their defense, these believers did have a lot of serious and justifiable reasons. They had been greatly persecuted, facing unrelenting trials and sufferings. They had experienced difficult adversities and injustices, from murder to imprisonment, at the hand of Saul, who was unrelentingly zealous in his efforts to destroy the church and anyone who associated with Christianity. As a result, these Christians were juggling an array of emotions, including fear, mourning, confusion, loneliness, and maybe even hopelessness. Some had fled their homes in fear of their lives, causing them to live in poverty and scrounge for every meal and penny. Some were sick, and everyone was exhausted. They had every right to be negative and pessimistic. James acknowledged their suffering, but he also let them know that inner joy and optimism could still be theirs, despite their adversities, if they deliberately chose to change their thinking. He encouraged them to pause and refocus on their faith, even when life was tough.

We may not experience religious persecution as the Jewish believers did, but let's face it: oftentimes life can make us feel persecuted. No matter what trying circumstance or difficult hardship we're enduring, we too are frequently faced with the choice of whether to let our circumstances steal our happiness. We too have to choose to fight against letting our troubles steal our joy and

our ability to think positively. We too need to seek God's help in making those choices and carrying them out. Either we can think thoughts that are pitiful or we can think thoughts that are powerful. The choice is ours.

What might happen if we asked God to help us change our perspective about the current troubles we are facing? Although it might be difficult to endure our problems with a smile and an optimistic outlook, doing so with great faith results in more positive actions and helps us become stronger, more mature, more optimistic, and more joyful.

This was certainly true for my friend Lori. She shared with me the battle that went on in her mind for years, and how she used to live with overwhelming fear.

As a little girl, she was afraid of her babysitters, teachers, meeting new friends, and speaking up in class. As she grew up, her fears morphed into a paralyzing stronghold that affected her entire life. She feared meeting new people, of living with roommates in college, and even of dating. Eventually, Lori's fears caused her to retreat into her own shell, becoming very shy and withdrawn in an attempt to feel safe, and at times being afraid to leave her home at all.

Just before her college graduation, she was raped, and all the accompanying shame, guilt, anxiety, and newly heightened fear began to hold her hostage in her own body. She was a prisoner to the thoughts in her head, and they had a strong hold on her life as a whole. Her negative thoughts influenced her feelings, which affected her life, which negatively affected her happiness.

But thankfully, Lori eventually grew tired of being imprisoned by fear, and one day she made the hard, yet life-changing choice to do something about it. She reached up to God and asked Him to help her change her thought patterns and take control of her life.

She began doing Bible studies to help her become more confident in who she was and to learn to understand the spiritual weapons at her disposal as a child of God. She began to recognize the mental and emotional prison her strongholds were keeping her in and gradually learned how to break free from them by reading and memorizing God's Word and spending time in prayer and journaling. She surrendered her fears to God and refused to live a lonely life full of worries and negative thinking. One little step of faith at a time, she overcame the stronghold of fear in her mind and embraced a life with less fear and more joy. Her decision to take control of her thoughts equipped her to take control of her life and her happiness.

In a similar way, shortly after I had my "I still love You, Lord" conversation with Jesus, I knew I needed to retake control of my thoughts. I realized I had been struggling with many negative mental strongholds, one of which was fear. Each morning I would wake up and the suffocating fears of what the present day, and the future, might hold would creep into my consciousness. I had become consumed with all the what-ifs. Nine times out of ten my what-ifs were followed up with a worst-case-scenario theory that pulled me deeper into darkness and hopelessness.

So I committed to working on my attitude and to surrendering all the fears that had been building up in my head for months.

I got out my journal and wrote down my fears one by one and, within minutes, had written out thirty-three fears. Thirty. Three. Paralyzing. Fears. Have mercy.

I didn't realize until that moment how my fears had multiplied or how much they were damaging my attitude, much less that they had such a strong power over my thoughts and perspectives. Immediately, I surrendered those fears and all the accompanying emotions to God in prayer and since have taken a stand to keep them from slipping back into my subconscious.

The difference that prayer of surrender made in my outlook and my life going forward amazed even me. Although my emotions and feelings were valid and justified, I had allowed them to take over my mind and, in turn, take over my life and my happiness, and this little journaling activity was an eye opener.

## *Don't Give Up!*

Maybe today your circumstances have caused you to struggle with overwhelming fears or strong emotions that make you feel like you're sinking in negativity or drowning in pessimism. If so, please don't beat yourself up—and for goodness sake, please don't give up on yourself! God created us to be emotional creatures, and whatever feelings we have are legitimate and valid. In fact, our emotions are like indicator lights on a car's dashboard: they point to something that needs attention, and in this case, it's our thoughts. Emotions are fueled by our thoughts, and that's okay, but Jesus never wanted us to be held hostage by them. He knew



life would be hard and reassures us all throughout the Bible of His presence, even when we are feeling persecuted by life or people. As we lean into Him and confess our desire to be transformed inside and out, the impossible becomes possible. For you and for me and for all of God's beloveds.

Proverbs 23:7 says, "For as he thinks in his heart, so is he" (NIV). In other words, what we think will be evident in our outward attitudes and actions. This means that our thoughts are nothing to take for granted. Our perspectives and thoughts hold the power to determine our attitudes and also our tomorrows. Fortunately, we get to choose what our tomorrows look like, one thought and one day at a time. In the words of Norman Vincent Peale, a popular minister and author, "Change your thoughts and you change your world."<sup>1</sup>

True joy and a positive attitude come from the choice to change your thoughts, not from a problem-free life. So, sweet friend, let today be the first day of your new optimistic life. Let it be the first day of a fresh season of life when you begin living a life of optimism, seeing the glass as half-full, instead of half-empty.

You are not alone in this battle. We can either give up or God-up, and when we God-up, He always shows up. As we sojourn through this book, we'll be unpacking three God-filled strategies that we need to put into practice in our daily lives if we want to transform our thoughts, feelings, and lifestyles:

1. *Notice* negative thoughts.
2. *Reject* negative thoughts.
3. *Replace* negative thoughts.

Scripture reinforces the importance of these three steps: “We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5 NIV). If you’re like me, you’ve always known this instruction was important but never really understood how to follow through. How do we take our thoughts captive and then change our lives? Well, sister, we’ll be exploring just that as we move forward in this journey toward optimism and joy.

As you read, I pray that God will open the door of your heart and help you begin to let your faith be in control of your mind so you can take back your thoughts. If you are ready to be rescued, God is ready to pull you out of the muck of negativity and discouragement. My hope is that when you get to the last page of this book, you will find yourself on the shores of a breathtaking place you didn’t know existed—a beautiful land where a positive mind and an optimistic heart thrive.

## STRATEGIES FOR TRANSFORMING YOUR THINKING

At the end of each chapter, you'll find several questions to help you apply to your own situation what you're learning from Tracie. These will help you get unstuck! So grab a journal or notebook from your closet, or purchase the accompanying journal from Tracie's website, [www.traciemiles.com](http://www.traciemiles.com), and commit to this work that will help you find freedom.

- This book is in your hands for a reason. What situation in your life today triggers the most dissatisfaction or distress? There may be several, but start with just one. Hold it in your heart as you read the rest of this book. Name it in your journal and write a prayer offering the person or situation to God. Close your eyes and picture God's gracious hands receiving your burden and gently holding this concern for you. Throughout the rest of this book, keep that image in your heart and mind.
- It would have been easy for Tracie to blame someone else for her distressing feelings. Make a comprehensive list of others you have blamed for your own circumstances. While some may *deserve* that blame, focusing on blame will only keep you stuck. Pray through each person, releasing him or her to God. Imagine the chain of blame being attached to an anchor pulling you down, and when you let go of those thoughts, picture yourself being released from captivity.

- There was a moment when Tracie realized she didn't want to spend her life stuck in negativity and unhappiness. Can you think of particular conversations, interactions, or private moments when you knew that something needed to change? Did someone else notice your negativity, or did you? Record those encounters—with others, with God, or with yourself—that made you want to live differently.
- What could be different in your life if you committed yourself to this process? Describe how you would be different, inside and out.

### *Mind-Renewing Memory Verses*

A key strategy for transforming our minds involves replacing lies and negative thoughts with promises and truths from God's Word that refute those lies and fill our minds with hope instead. Below are some verses that you can copy in your journal, notepad, or on notecards so you can read them throughout the week. Committing these verses to memory will build a spiritual arsenal that you can call on when negativity strikes and is an important step in winning the war for your thoughts.

The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. (2 Cor. 10:4 NIV)

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. (James 1:2–5 NIV)

You, LORD, give true peace  
to those who depend on you,  
because they trust you. (Isa. 26:3 NCV)

We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. (2 Cor. 10:5 NIV)

For as he thinks in his heart, so is he. (Prov. 23:7 NIV)

## *Chapter Challenge*

In your journal, or even using a notes or memo app on your phone, begin keeping track of each time you find yourself struggling with

a negative thought or emotion. Don't judge yourself for them. Just notice and record them. Then, each time you record something, ask God to intervene and begin equipping you spiritually to think and feel differently. Tracie will let you know what to do with them soon! For now, simply offer these to God.

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