

Hope-Filled Thinking

Serving Leaders in Life

This article was written by Dr. David Ferguson and Dr. Andy Ward, Intimacy Therapy Network.

Pastors: Undoubtedly, we are under attack from the “silent enemy,” called COVID-19. Our *living abundantly* is being threatened, but our **hope-filled thinking** can undergird us in the battle.

“The thief comes to steal, kill, and destroy, but I come to give you life and life abundant” (John 10:10).

Fear is what we call a “heart hindrance” to abundant life; it’s one of those painful emotions in our emotional cup that has us so focused on **fear**, we struggle to enjoy the **present** moment.

From the viewpoint of our Spirit-empowered faith discipleship journey, our living abundantly “in the present” is possible as “His Word brings healing to our **fears**”— outcome W9 in the *Spirit-empowered Faith Outcomes*. In our *Intimacy Therapy* practice, our **counseling** and **caregiving** supports this journey in Christ-likeness.

“For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline” (2 Timothy 1:7).

God has not left us without instruction, but He has given us His Word to be experienced in life. As we actually **live the Word**, it sets us free for abundant living.

“Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit” (Romans 15:13).





Researchers would tell us that *optimistic thinking*, or what we will call *hope-filled thinking*, is a key to our personal well-being. Psychologists use the term “negativity bias” in our thinking to describe our predisposition “for fight or flight.”

In a good way, we seem wired to survive by thinking through worst case scenarios to remain safe. For example: if a car starts swerving onto your side of the road, you instinctively steer one way or the other to get out of the way and avoid a wreck. The challenge comes when we begin to see possible wrecks and panic with EVERY CAR we pass. Our “negativity bias” becomes out of control and extreme pessimism, anxiety, and fear can overcome us.

In this time of COVID-19 crisis, this battle between extreme pessimism and positive optimism, between fear and hope, becomes even more significant as we go about our daily lives, constrained from living “normal” and also keenly aware of the life-threatening consequences.

Many of our *Intimacy Therapy* trainings include an emphasis on the battle between *healthy* versus *unhealthy* thinking, and now is a great time to “up our game” in this battle of the mind.

“And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (Romans 5:3–5).

Here is an important principle and several practical tips for practicing more hope-filled thinking:

Control what you can **control** and don’t waste brain power and conversations around **what you can’t control!** (The clinical terminology is “Locus of Control.”)

A few practical tips for practicing this principle include:

- **FIRST:** Follow the guidance of **health professionals** and **local authorities**. Ignoring these guidelines puts you additionally at risk, **and** as others observe your unsafe actions, it can provoke additional fear in **them**. Practicing social distancing, covering coughs, staying home when you are sick, and following other guidelines in this crisis are ways we can **put people first**. We can be a **“giving first people,”** going about doing good as Jesus did (Acts 10:38).





- **SECOND:** Limit the amount of COVID-19 news, commentary, and statistics you *consume* each day; tracking stats on numbers of cases, stock market prices, and what stores are sold out of what items can almost become addictive. Negative thinking around these topics only increases anxiety and fear.
- **THIRD:** Limit your amount of **talking** about all the statistics and news. You can **learn** from what has already happened, *but you can't control or change it!* Plus, reminding your friends or co-workers how bad things are doesn't really help you or them! For sure, you need to be realistic and prudent in your *planning* because your *future* is something you **can** impact.
- **FINALLY**, we can **increase** our positive, hope-filled thinking through such things as:
 - **Planning** activities to **look forward to** then thinking and talking about those things.
 - Schedule a time to put together a puzzle with your kids, play dominoes with your spouse, and have scheduled weekly "check-in" times with family and friends over Zoom®, Skype®, or FaceTime®.
 - Be intentional to think and dwell on **best case** scenarios or even **mixed case** scenarios in your mind, rather than purely **worst case** outcomes. This helps fight negativity that can grow quickly if not challenged.
 - Take time to remember how God has been faithful to you and your family in past, even in hard times. God's love, provision, and support in difficult times is steadfast, and one of the ways we can "take our thoughts captive" is to recall to mind the "faithfulness of the Lord" (2 Corinthians 10:5; Psalms 33:5).



You only have *so much* "thinking capacity," and *when you focus it positively on future plans*, you reduce anxiety over aspects of the future you *can't control*.

Researchers tell us that more positive thinking and talk decreases anxiety and increases our ability to **focus** on what really matters—actually "being present" in our relationships at home as well as with friends, family, co-workers, and customers. Hope-filled thinking increases personal well-being or happiness as it is often called. Plus, this type of thinking improves our immune system, increases life-expectancy, and enriches our relationships! It's a BIG DEAL!

