

**STAY AWAKE
COMBATING NEGATIVE THOUGHTS**

I'M OK WITH THAT
WEEKEND!

**CAUSES
28 OF
DISCONTENT**

>>>

www.devozine.org SEPT-OCT 2013 **29**

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ALWAYS WANTING MORE

"What would you want if you could have anything?" The question was posed to a group of my friends. I thought they would dream of money, popularity, or opportunity; but "contentment" was a frequent response.

When Paul reminds us in Philippians 4:13 that we can do all things through Christ, he is speaking not about grabbing for more but about being content. Paul had experienced being in need and having plenty, and he had learned to be content in all circumstances. We too can be assured that God will help us find contentment in every situation.

Mary Lynn Johnson, 21 [Signal Mountain, Tennessee]

FOCUSING ON THE NEGATIVE

I am not content with my life. I do not like who I am, how I look, or how I relate to my family. I look at everything with a negative attitude. So my dad challenged me to begin making a daily list of ten good things that happened that day. It wasn't easy at first, but each night I looked back over the day and picked out what had made me happy. My nightly reflections have helped me to realize that I have a good life but a bad attitude. Yet, each good thing I write helps me move one step closer to having a positive attitude. God and my family are helping me to change my outlook on life, which is another reason to be grateful.

Kristin O'Connor, 18 [North Kingstown, Rhode Island]

WISHING FOR BETTER OPTIONS

For years, I was not content with my life. But I didn't want things; I wanted friends and status. Finally, I realized that much of my discontent stemmed from always wanting more options. So I gave up dreams of finding a perfect best friend and chose to enjoy the people who were already in my life. I gave up finding a perfect job, choosing to do my best in the job I had. Ultimately, I turned over my longings and heartbreak to God, knowing that contentment was a choice God would help me make over and over again. My life isn't perfect, but I never knew life could be this good.

Jennifer DeGroot [Hamilton, Montana]

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OBSESSING OVER THAT ONE THING

I think, *As soon as I get that one thing, I'll be content.* Yet, with that perspective, contentment doesn't last, because as soon as I accomplish that one thing, another comes along. For a long time, people have been trying to find the one thing that leads to contentment. The author of Ecclesiastes tried having fun, being wise, being rich, being in charge; and none of them kept him content for long. In the end, he learned what I too have discovered: Discontentment leads us to obsess about that one thing. Contentment comes from being grateful for what we have and serving God wherever God has called us.

Savannah Wood, 19 [Colfax, Iowa]

TRYING TO MAKE THINGS PERFECT

Most of the time, I feel that I could be a better person with a better life. Yet, sometimes I realize that I don't need to worry about how to make things better, that the life I have is good enough. I wish I could learn to be content instead of trying to make my life perfect. Being content is a difficult skill to cultivate; but if we are always trying to change, we may never realize how lucky we are. <

Wesley Overhults [Lexington, Kentucky]

29 NEXT DAY STRETCH

THE SECRET OF CONTENTMENT

It's not that I don't dream big dreams
or that I lack in self-esteem.

It's not that I don't strive for more
or kick ambition out the door.

It's that no matter what my goal,
I keep obsession in control.

It's that I work hard, hope, and sweat,
and do my best without regret,
then set my efforts at the throne—
a gift for God, and God alone.

Results, no matter what I've spent,
are in God's hands; so I'm content.

Lori Scott [Fort Worth, Texas]

STAY AWAKE COMBATING NEGATIVE THOUGHTS

SUNNY SIDE UP

WEEKEND!

practice being positive

If you need to change a negative attitude, here's help.

SURROUND YOURSELF WITH POSITIVE PEOPLE

Our attitude strongly influences how we get through tough times. So does the company we keep. When I spend time with people who are negative, I begin to adopt the same attitude. I see the bad in everything because it's pointed out to me. When I surround myself with positive people, I begin to see God in difficult situations. My outlook begins to change. As I'm learning the importance of the company I keep, I'm also challenging myself to be more positive so that I can influence others in ways that please God.

Tynea Lewis [New Holland, Pennsylvania]

LEARN FROM A ROLE MODEL

The person who inspires me most is my mom. She pushes me and keeps me going strong when times are hard. Even when my life is fine, she finds ways to make it better. Mom is my role model. She is the strongest woman I know (and she's been through a lot with me). Whatever happens, she is selfless and caring, putting others before herself. She is a joy to be around and always makes me smile. I can't thank her enough; but I try to honor her through my accomplishments, in the way I treat other people, and by following her example.

Emoni Williams, 17 [Acworth, Georgia]

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SUNNY SIDE UP

WEEKEND!

CHANGE YOUR VOCABULARY

We get so busy that even the things we want to do become a burden. Practice changing your perspective: This week, take the words *have to* out of your vocabulary. Change “I *have to* take out the trash” to “I *get to* take out the trash.” You’ll be amazed at how positive your outlook will become.

Addison Lander, 15, and Matthew Golden, 16 [Nortonville, Kentucky]

FIND SOMEONE WHO WILL LET YOU VENT

When negativity is not allowed and we’re expected to smile and be happy, the negativity simmers until we get angry. Expressing negativity once in a while and getting it out of our system is a good thing. When bad things happen, I talk with my closest friends, and we cheer one another up. Having someone acknowledge that it’s OK to vent puts me on the path to positivity.

Sarah Klauda [Baltimore, Maryland]

BRIGHTEN THE LIVES OF PEOPLE AROUND YOU

We hear how youth can change the world, but it’s not an item we can write on our to-do list and check off before the weekend. So how do we begin? We can smile. I know it sounds simple, but a smile can be powerful. A smile calms fears and eases anxiety. So smile at the world; maybe it will smile back. At least, you will brighten the lives of people around you and make a difference in their day.

Kamilah Asafa [Ashland, Kentucky]

24 NEXT DAY STRETCH

REMEMBER GOD IS WITH YOU

You didn’t hear the alarm and missed the bus. You left your homework on the kitchen table. And now you’re taking a pop quiz in Math. On days when nothing seems to go right, remember that God is with you, working to bring good in and through your life. Read **Ephesians 4:22–24**. Seek to change your attitude to one that pleases God.

Prayer: Lord, help us to know that every day is a good day because of what we learn and experience and because of what we give to others. Whatever happens, we know that you are with us, which is reason enough to be happy. Amen.

Rachel Woodrume [Cypress, Texas]

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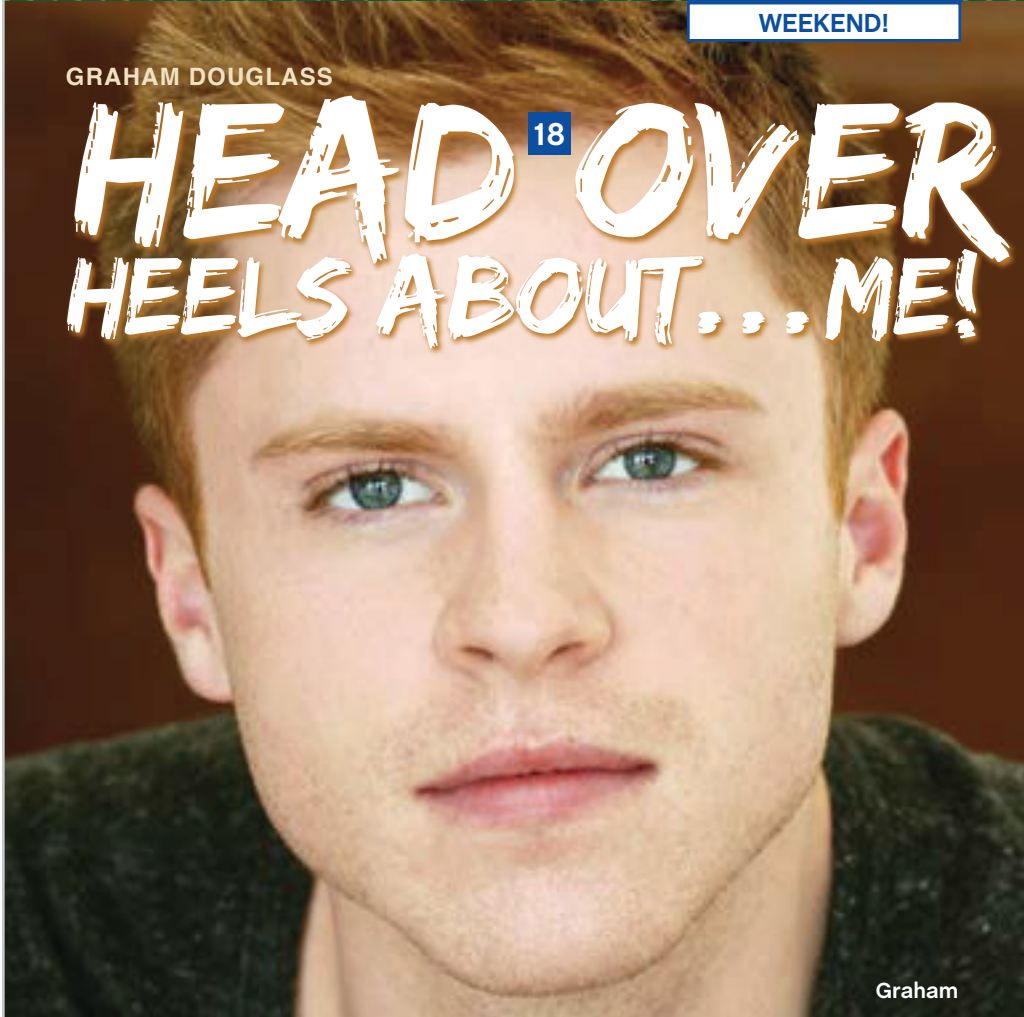
STAY AWAKE COMBATING NEGATIVE THOUGHTS

LOVING MYSELF

WEEKEND!

GRAHAM DOUGLASS

HEAD ¹⁸ OVER HEELS ABOUT... ME!



Graham

“You’re not good enough.” “Don’t even try.” “He is so much better than you.” Sound familiar?

The small but powerful voice is all too familiar to me. It started as a whisper; but over the years, it grew into a devouring monster that filled my mind with negative thoughts and bared its vicious teeth at my weakest and most vulnerable moments. >>>

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LOVING MYSELF

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➤ Over the last two years, the monster expanded its territory. I felt physically weak, my heart raced, my mind clouded, and I eventually lost touch with myself. Even on good days, I preferred hiding at home rather than facing the world. Simply put, I disliked myself.

God felt distant. In rare moments when I vaguely sensed God's presence, I didn't welcome it. I was angry. How could God, who professes deep unconditional love for me, sit back as I spiraled into detached darkness?

My way of life had become a destructive habit, maybe even a toxic addiction. I fearfully wandered a sharp, rocky path in the dead of night.

A "destructive habit" and a "toxic addiction"—my point is that in the devouring darkness, I still had a choice. I say it again: *I had a choice*. I could feed the monster with negative thinking or I could starve it.

With the aid of my long-time friend, Dan, executive director of Mount Horeb House Ministries, I learned that God blesses God's children with the ability to choose. However, God lets us decide how to utilize this gift.

My time with Dan also taught me how profoundly I believed in fear. Fear-based thinking had become so common for me that I trusted it to protect me. Yet I dreamed of freedom from my destructive thoughts. It was time to trust God and to love myself.

I chose a divine addiction, sending my negative beliefs to God and replacing them with empowering thoughts that were grounded in God's fulfilling peace. God began to show me that God is my protector, that I am good enough, that I do have something to offer, and that I can love myself. Actually, God demands that I love myself.

The darkness lifted, and my path felt smoother. I had purpose: loving myself.

As a society we are convinced that fear is crucial to living, that without it we are lazy or unmotivated. Believing the fear that lurks around every corner, we think we're a failure if we aren't chosen for the team. We think we're not smart enough if we aren't granted an internship. Sound familiar?

What would happen if we released our fears to God and chose to empower and love ourselves instead? Try it. Grant yourself permission and freedom to love. Love yourself! ◀

Graham Douglass is a former devozine TAB member. He currently lives in New York City, where he works in television and as an actor.

19 NEXT DAY STRETCH

For one day, keep track on your phone or in a notepad of the negative thoughts you have about yourself. At the end of the day, review the list and release each negative thought to God. Rewrite each thought, transforming it into a positive statement. Then write on sticky notes loving and empowering thoughts about yourself. Stick them on your bathroom mirror, in school binders, wherever they will help you remember that you are loved.

