

JENNIE ALLEN

*New York Times* bestselling author  
of *Get Out of Your Head*

# STOP THE SPIRAL

DEVOTIONAL

100 Days of  
BREAKING FREE  
from Negative  
Thoughts



**SNEAK  
PEEK**

SAMPLE ONLY

**STOP**  
**THE** 100 Days of  
**BREAKING FREE**  
from Negative Thoughts  
**SPIRAL**  
DEVOTIONAL

**JENNIE ALLEN**

WATERBROOK



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## A NOTE FROM JENNIE



God has great timing. Perhaps you're seeing this in your life.

Many of us have experienced a bit of a wake-up call recently, whether due to global unrest, political tensions, or personal challenges. We've been forced to stop and look at the state of our minds. Or we've been confronted with changes that have happened inside us over weeks, months, and years, and we don't exactly like what we see. But if you've opened this book, maybe it's because you've sensed that now is the time to do something about all that is swirling in and around you.

For so many of us, who have been paddling busily on the lake of our lives, the lake has suddenly drained, and we've seen what was at the bottom. And what it was, was a lot of mess. A lot of turmoil and mental suffering. And rather than being new junk, maybe it's been on the bottom of our lakes for quite some time—ignored or shoved out of sight until now.

But gazing down at it, many of us are thinking, *Wow, I think I've*

*been anxious for a long time, but I've been busy enough that I didn't notice. Or, Wow, I've felt depressed and tired for a long time, and maybe I need to get some help.* As we consider the state of our minds, we're realizing, something's got to change.

We need a new normal.

Maybe you've been struggling with low levels of anxiety for a long time. Or maybe you've recently experienced a season of difficulty or stress that has caused a spike of anxiety. The past few years of unrest and uncertainty have definitely revealed hidden anxieties many of us were already feeling. Whatever your unique situation, you might be asking, *What am I supposed to do with these thoughts? What do I do with these feelings?*

What if I told you that you don't have to spiral in toxic thoughts anymore? What if I told you that God has the power not only to save our souls but also to change our lives? I've seen Him do this for other people, and I have seen Him do this in me.

A few years ago, I went through a season of attack. It was quiet, it was subtle, and I barely noticed, honestly. It came every night at 3 a.m., when I was jolted awake, and simmering anxieties and doubts began to fill my mind. It beat me up for month upon month. And the bad part was, I didn't even realize it was happening. I thought it was just inevitable, that I had no control over it. I was at war with the devil in the night, but I never admitted it out loud. For eighteen months I never told anybody what was happening. When I finally did mention it to people, the second I did, it was obvious: *This was not who I was.* I had been spiraling down, listening to lies. But I didn't see it because I was not guarding my mind.

So what happened during month after month of me waking up in the middle of the night, and hearing the devil telling me whatever the heck he wanted alone in the dark? There was a cost to my faith. And to my health. And to my relationships. Patterns of toxic thinking became grooved into my mind. Maybe you know what that's like—that suffering and feeling out of control. But I can also tell you, when I realized I could fight it, everything shifted.

I believe we are at war and that the enemy of our souls is coming for us in ways that we hardly notice: in the fears and anxieties in our minds. I believe that for you, in some way, the enemy is targeting the peace of your mind. Those lies are real to you and coming at you every day.

In our generation, we're facing some unique spirals that pull us down and rob us of peace and joy and of the effectiveness that we could have for the kingdom of God. In this journey of rewiring downward spirals, we'll approach them one by one. We'll also look at research in psychology and neuroscience, because in studies of the brain, you cannot deny the power of God in the ways He built our minds. When it comes to the science of the brain, it backs up the Bible. It's wild. All the truths the Bible gives us about our minds—that we can take every thought captive and that we have power over our thoughts—all of these truths are spelled out in science. It's true. There's hope. We can change our minds.

Consider this one-hundred-day devotional your invitation to start noticing spiraling thought patterns—every day. To start getting wise to these toxic thought spirals that have taken so much of your life and peace. Yes, the enemy is targeting you. But I am here to tell you, God

loves you, and He is also fighting for you. Our God says that we have the power to destroy strongholds. That we can be transformed by the renewal of our minds, which direct how we will live, who we will love, and what we will do with our time on this earth.

Breaking the cycle of toxic thoughts is an active process, which is why it's important to take it day by day—not passively thinking about whatever pops into our heads, but actively fighting to believe truth and to fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. As we fixate on Him, the things of this earth grow less powerful. This is how we change. Imperfectly, slowly, messily even, but turning to Jesus again and again. Jesus is so real and present and here for us in this process, even as we fall and get back up.

What's on the other side of this fight? Now that I have done war with this part of my life, after going through it myself, I've never been more joyful, I've never been more free, I've never been more grateful, and I've never been more peaceful.

Of course I still spiral sometimes. Life on this earth can never be an endless victory lap. The goal, though, is not to be some kind of perfect mental ninja. It's to come closer to the God who adores us, who made our minds, and who made it possible for us to join Him in walking in the freedom He gives. Because God has grace for me and you, and wants our freedom, we can want it for ourselves. And because it's not done in my own strength or your own strength, we can breathe and have hope that God will do the freeing as we turn to Him each day.

A lot can happen in one hundred days. Mental pathways can be rewritten. Minds can be freed. Spirals can be flipped upside down.

Whether you go into this journey on your own with a journal and your Bible or with friends and partners fighting for each other, take this time to get honest and to think about your thoughts. To go to war against lies. To expand your understanding and compassion. To connect. To pray. To renew your reliance on a God who sets you free.

In this book, you'll find one hundred days of devotions to challenge your thinking, to encourage you, and to remind you of God's sufficiency and grace on the road to rewiring negative spirals. Each day's reading includes the following:

- *a short devotional essay*
- *verses for meditating on and soaking your soul in God's Word*
- *a "Rewire the Spiral" statement to speak over yourself*
- *a prayer for sparking a daily conversation with the Creator of your soul, who wants to bring peace to your mind*

I believe that the battle for your mind matters more than we can understand, and that God wants you to live more freely than you are right now. So I am praying huge prayers for you. But I also want to pray small prayers—that you'll see a glimmer of hope, that God will set you free, and that you will have your eyes opened. That you will see in a new way the enemy and what he wants for you, and that you will have nothing to do with it. That you would go to war. That you would fight better than you ever have, and that you would know what it is to rewire the spirals in your mind, in Jesus's name.

# BEFORE YOU BEGIN



## YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

You may have lived with low-grade sadness for as long as you can remember. Or maybe for you, it's far worse than that—a daily struggle, accompanied even by suicidal thoughts.

If mental illness is a struggle you face, may I please wrap loving arms around you, look you in the eyes, and whisper, “This—your anxiety or depression or bipolar disorder or suicidal thoughts—is not your fault”?

You may be suffering from a true chemical breakdown in your body. I get that. Several members of my family depend on medicine to help regulate their brain chemistry. Please hear me: There is no shame in that choice. Praise God for tools that help.

I just want you to know—please, lean in close and hear this—that throughout this book, whenever I talk about God giving us a choice

about how we think, I am not suggesting that you can think your way out of mental illness. I am not. I have experienced seasons of anxiety so brutal that I was paralyzed.

There are seasons when we need help in the form of counseling and medicine. But I hope to show you in the coming pages that in every season there is help we can access for ourselves. And that learning to think a single thought can help each one of us—those of us who struggle with mental illness and those whose struggles are of a different sort.

## THE STARTING LINE

I can't imagine a more anxious and spiraling feeling than being unsure about the meaning of life and the future of my soul. So before we begin, I would like to share the foundational truth that shapes the entire perspective of this devotional: We have been created on purpose for a purpose. We are designed for an intimate relationship with God forever. That is the context in which we begin to stop our spirals, to get out of our heads, and to be truly free in our souls and minds. Saint Augustine said, "You have made us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in You."<sup>1</sup> In other words, we will forever spin out until we know the One who saves us.

So if you are unsure today if you know Jesus, or if you need reminding of what He has done to make your healing possible, here's the foundation for everything we're going to talk about in these one hundred days: the gospel, or the good news.<sup>2</sup>

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1 Augustine of Hippo, *Saint Augustine's Confessions*, trans. Albert C. Outler (Mineola, NY: Courier Dover, 2002), 103.

2 Adapted from Jennie Allen, *Made for This* (Nashville: W Publishing, 2019), 269–70.



We had a perfect relationship with God until sin entered the world through Adam and Eve. And with sin came the promise of death and eternal separation from God. But from the moment of the first sin, God issued a promise that would bring us back to Him.

The penalty had to be paid.

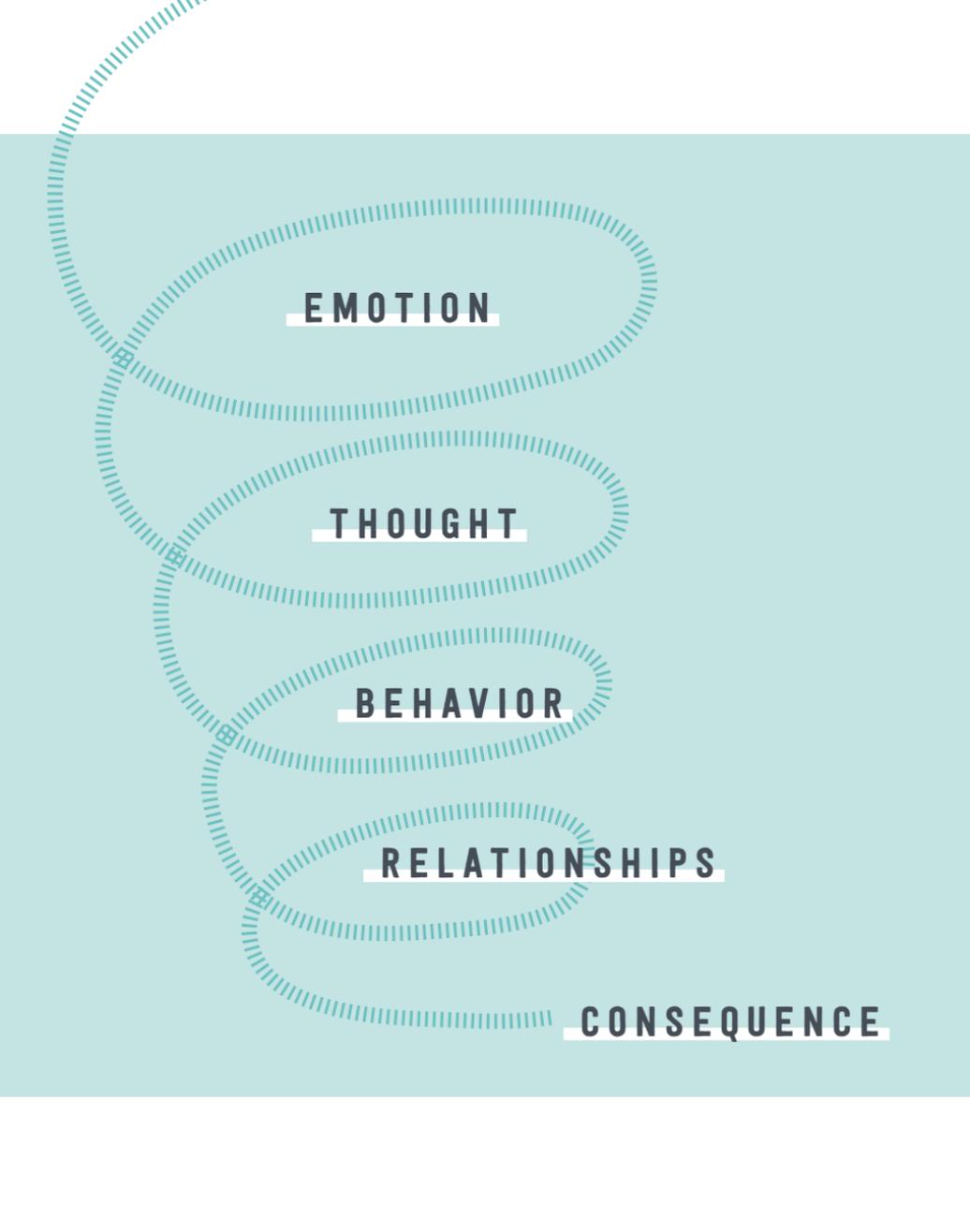
Our sin was to be placed on a perfect sacrifice. God would send His own blameless, perfect Son to bear our sin and suffer our fate—to get us back.

Jesus came fulfilling thousands of years of prophecy, lived a perfect life, and died a gruesome death, reconciling our payment for our sin. Then after three days, He defeated death, rose from the grave, and now is seated with the Father, waiting for us.

Anyone who accepts the blood of Jesus for the forgiveness of their sin is adopted as a child of God and is issued God's very own Spirit, who seals and empowers us to live this life for Him.

Our souls will spin, restless and wanting, until they rest in God. After all, we were made for Him, and He gave everything so that our souls could finally and forever rest in Him.

If you have never trusted Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, you can trust Him this moment. Just tell Him your need for Him and tell Him of your trust in Him as your Lord and Savior. That's where everything begins.



**EMOTION**

**THOUGHT**

**BEHAVIOR**

**RELATIONSHIPS**

**CONSEQUENCE**



INTRODUCING  
**THE  
SPIRAL**

## YOU ARE NOT A PROJECT TO BE FIXED

WHEN I FIRST STARTED TO THINK ABOUT MY THOUGHTS, I VIEWED MY mind as something I could fix. But the longer I thought about it, the more I realized that my mind is part of me, and it does the things it does to attempt to take care of me. There are *reasons* I struggle with doubt and fear and anxiety and anger. Good reasons. And for you, I know it's true too. If we never go back and really look compassionately at why we get where we are in our spirals, we end up with the shame of having to "fix it." And we end up with more shame when it breaks again.

But God is a God of mercy. We see that throughout the entire Bible.

In the Old Testament, He is patient with Israel and continues to give chance after chance. He is patient with David and the mistakes David makes, calling him a man after His own heart even when David does unthinkable things that we all would write him off, cancel him, and push him away for. He loves David throughout the span of his life, not just when he is winning but when he's confessing appalling sins.

In the New Testament, we see a compassionate God in Jesus. We see a God who came to earth to rescue people from their own decisions. We

see a God who said, *You know what? I will make a way for all the places where you have messed up. I won't even ask you to fix it. I will fix it.*

The story of Jesus is not one in which we got our act together and then God saved us. It's one in which we were completely dead in our transgressions and in our mistakes, and God rescued us anyway and set us apart.

The whole of the Bible is super clear on the fact that we have limits, that we're going to make mistakes, that we are not completely curable on earth, and yet that we're filled with the Spirit who is helping us. We are new creations that can produce good and the fruit of the Spirit. And yet we're still going to struggle with our flesh and with our minds, daily.

I'd never want you to think that you're easily fixable. Or that on the days when you spiral, you should feel shame in any way. If anything, you should feel hope that you need God, and that we have a God who is accessible to us when we come to Him. He has compassion for us, so we can have compassion for ourselves.

#### **MEDITATE:**

God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved.  
(Ephesians 2:4–5)

#### **REWIRE THE SPIRAL:**

I do not have to fix myself because Jesus died to make me right with God.

*God, thank You for being a God of mercy. When I get tired on this journey, when I hit my limits, wash me again in Your patience, Your love, Your compassion.  
Amen.*

## HOW QUIETNESS BREAKS OUR SPIRALS

OF ALL THE HARD WORK WE DO TO TAKE OUR THOUGHTS CAPTIVE, quietness might be the hardest of all—sitting down, all alone, in the hush. At the same time, the one pattern that has been most useful for me is the practice of time alone with God, because the silence is where my thought life changed. And connection with God is the foundation for every other God-given tool we have in our arsenal. If supernatural change is what we want, we have to go to our supernatural God to find it.

And how exactly do we do that? The practice of stillness and solitude in the presence of God is the basis of our strategy for interrupting all kinds of problematic thought patterns. Consider how simply thinking about God can shift your spiraling thoughts. If, say, you're in a high-pressure situation at work, these thoughts might churn their way through your mind:

*I'm upset because I was passed over for the promotion I deserved.*

*I'm stressed because I'm working overtime yet not making ends meet.*

*I'm anxious because I'm running behind on my project and letting people down.*

*I'm frustrated because my boss is a micromanager.*

Notice the pattern in each of these thoughts: [Negative emotion] *because* [reason].

*I'm stressed **because** I'm working overtime.*

*I'm angry **because** she was rude.*

*I'm frustrated **because** I didn't keep my commitment to myself.*

*I'm overwhelmed **because** I have too much to do.*

With each tool God has given us to fight effectively in this battle for our minds, we get to rewrite that negative pattern while taking back the power He has given us. We can reframe our situations with a new pattern: [Negative emotion], *and* [reason], *so I will* [choice].<sup>1</sup>

*I'm upset, **and** I was passed over, **so I will choose** to remember that God has not forgotten me.*

*I'm angry, **and** she was rude, **so I will choose** to meditate on God's kindness toward me.*

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<sup>1</sup> For more on cognitive reframing, see Elizabeth Scott, "4 Steps to Shift Perspective and Change Everything," Verywell Mind, June 16, 2019, [www.verywellmind.com/cognitive-reframing-for-stress-management-3144872](https://www.verywellmind.com/cognitive-reframing-for-stress-management-3144872).

*I'm frustrated, and I didn't keep my commitment to myself, so I will choose to look up verses on God's mercy toward me and how it's new every single day.*

*I'm overwhelmed, and I have too much to do, so I will choose to pause and thank God for existing outside the boundaries of time and for empowering me to accomplish only that which I need to do.*

When you're stuck in a downward spiral of distraction, to what truth will you shift your thoughts? How will you combat the lie that anything other than quieting yourself before God will truly satisfy you?

**MEDITATE:**

For God alone my soul waits in silence; from him comes my salvation. (Psalm 62:1)

**REWIRE THE SPIRAL:**

My heart was made to be still before God.

*God, thank You for making it possible to rewrite the patterns in my brain. Ignite in me a craving for Your presence and teach me to choose You over and over again. Amen.*

## THE PATTERN

THERE'S A PATTERN AT WORK IN MANY OF US. OUR THOUGHTS ARE LEADING us to emotions, and those emotions are dictating our decisions, and our decisions are determining our behaviors, and then our behaviors are shaping our relationships—all of which take us back either to healthy or unhealthy thoughts. Round and round and round we go, spinning down, seemingly out of control, all of it equaling the sum of our lives.

So many of us spend all our energy in conversations and counseling and prayer, trying to shift the most visceral thing about us—our emotions—yet having no success. After all, if you're feeling sad and I tell you to quit feeling sad, has any progress been made? Not really. So it's time to try something different.

Instead of spending our energy trying to fix our symptoms, we should go straight to the root of the problem, deeper even than our emotions. The reality is that our emotions are a by-product of something else. Our emotions are a by-product of the way we think.

What's good about this news is that we can change our thinking. The Bible tells us so. In the book of Romans, the apostle Paul tells us we can

be “transformed by the renewal of [our] mind” (12:2). And a deep dive into the inner workings of the brain confirms what the Bible says: Not only can our thoughts be changed, but we can be the ones to change them.

The enemy of our souls would have us think we are stuck the way we are. That the way we think is just “us,” even if we don’t like where it takes us. But God’s truth tells us something different: We can, in fact, change. Science and the Bible confirm that we can interrupt our thoughts. Our brains are full of neuropathways, some shallow and some dug deep from a lifetime of thoughts, but all are moldable. In both cases, God is mighty to save. In both cases, He’s mighty to heal.

You don’t have to spin out in your thoughts. As you learn to interrupt your thoughts with God’s truth, you will discover that He is after your freedom.

#### **MEDITATE:**

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

(Romans 12:2)

#### **REWIRE THE SPIRAL:**

I’m not a victim to my thoughts.  
I can interrupt them.

*God, thank You for making me with the ability to change, and for fashioning my brain with the ability to rewire. When I feel stuck in my thoughts, lead me again toward Your truth. Amen.*

## ONE THOUGHT

GOD BUILT A WAY FOR US TO ESCAPE THE DOWNWARD SPIRAL THAT OUR thoughts tend to go into. But we rarely take it. We have bought the lie that we are victims to our thoughts rather than warriors equipped to fight on the front lines of the greatest battle of our generation: the battle for our minds.

The apostle Paul understood the war that takes place in our thoughts, how our circumstances and imaginations can become weapons that undermine our faith and hope. That's why he instructs us to "take every thought captive to obey Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5).

Take *every* thought captive? Every one of them? Is that possible? Have you ever tried?

Is God serious?

Our thoughts run wilder than a hyperactive sparrow. Did you know that people have twelve to sixty thousand thoughts per day? And of those, 80 percent are negative, and 95 percent are repetitive thoughts from the

day before?<sup>1</sup> Clearly the spiral is real and stuffed with more thoughts than it seems we can manage.

But what if, instead of trying to take every thought captive, you took just one thought captive?

What if one beautiful, powerful thought could shift this chaotic spiral of your life for the better . . . every time you thought it? What if you could grab hold of one truth that would shift the tempest of untruths that has left you feeling powerless over your brain?

One thought to think. Could you do that?

While we may not be able to take every thought captive in every situation we face every day, we can learn to take *one* thought captive and, in doing so, affect every other thought to come.

What's that thought?

*I have a choice.*

That's it.

*I have a choice.*

If you have trusted in Jesus as your Savior, you have the power of God in you to choose! You have a God-given, God-empowered, and God-redeemed choice regarding what you think about. You have a choice regarding where you focus your energy and what you live for.

*I have a choice.*

You are not subject to your behaviors, genes, or circumstances.

You are not subject to your passions, lusts, or emotions.

You are not subject to your thoughts.

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<sup>1</sup> Benjamin Hardy, "To Have What You Want, You Must Give-Up What's Holding You Back," Mission.org, June 9, 2018, <https://medium.com/the-mission/to-have-what-you-want-you-must-give-up-whats-holding-you-back-65275f844a5a>.

You have a choice because you are a conqueror who possesses weapons to destroy strongholds of the enemy in your life.

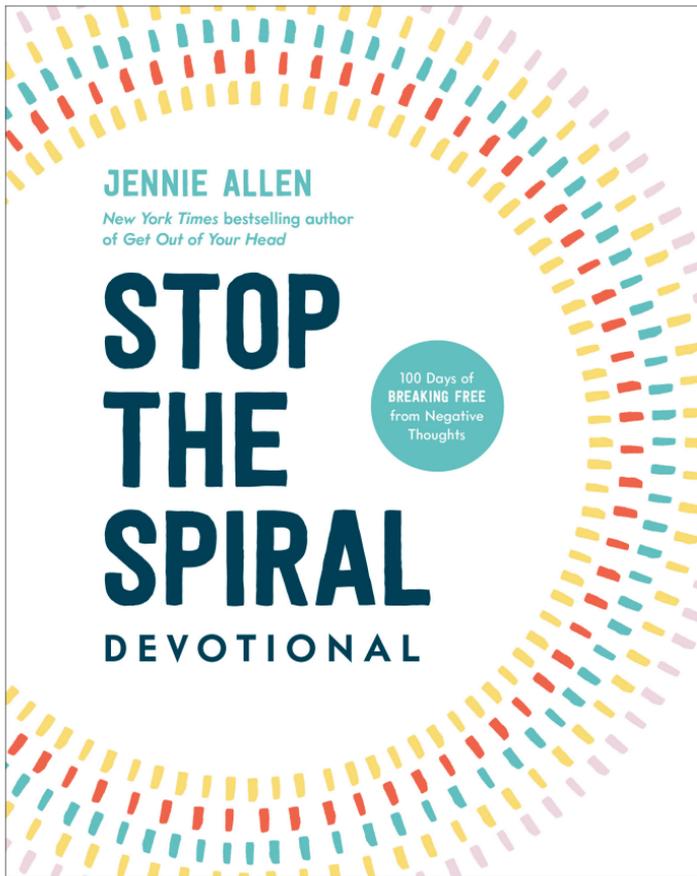
**MEDITATE:**

The weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ. (2 Corinthians 10:4–5)

**REWIRE THE SPIRAL:**

I can grab one thought—I have a choice.

*God, thank You for giving me a choice in what happens inside my head. Please remind me today to grab this one thought every time I feel my mind slipping into a spiral. I rely on Your divine power. Amen.*



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**WATERBROOK**

