

## FROM PIT TO POT

-By Linda Easter, M.C., L.P.C.

*One little vowel can make a big difference in changing the meaning of two consonants. Take, for instance, the words "pit" and "pot." I'm thinking of the Bible's Joseph, spoiled, favorite, 11th child of Jacob, father of the twelve tribes of Israel. Joseph's ten older brothers seethed with jealousy. One day they found the opportune way to get rid of their competition. They threw Joseph into a pit. Then they sold Joseph, and he spent many years in Egypt as a slave and later as a prisoner. Yet he always remained a moldable pot in the Master Potter's hands. Consequently, he became second in command of one of the most advanced nations of his time.*

*How did he do it?*

### The Power of Perspective

As changing the vowel makes a big difference in words like pit and pot, changing perspective makes a huge difference in a person's life. Joseph knew he had choices. A worldly perspective justified his right to feel angry—a bitter victim of his hateful brothers. However, he took God's perspective, maintaining his values, behaving obediently, and living the daily grind of his fate with character. God blessed that perspective. It took time, but Joseph's climb from pit to pot to the ruling class of Egypt holds great lessons about the power of perspective.

I recall my own climb out of a personal pit when my husband and I struggled after devastating circumstances. I avoided an anger perspective because God's peace accompanied me through months of emotional and painful situations. I had sought God, and He came through. His word nourished my soul, and I slept like a baby each night. I knew an anger perspective would be a slap in His face. Instead, I felt lost in a pain perspective. I couldn't even sit through church without dissolving into tears. Then one Sunday a pastor said, "Nothing happens in your life that isn't Father-filtered." That term came from a chapter of Rick Warren's book, The Purpose Driven Life. Warren said that biblically, God calls us to face troubles either as character development or as opportunities to behave God's way, bringing praise and glory to Him.

This insight brought me to a new, godly perspective. That perspective helped me persevere in faith, trusting God that in His timing, I like Joseph, would have a victorious outcome if I remained true to Him. It took three years to see that outcome. During that time, as I approached each new problem from a godly perspective, being a pliable pot in the Potter's hands, I emerged from that pit as a pot with more Christ-like character, praise God!

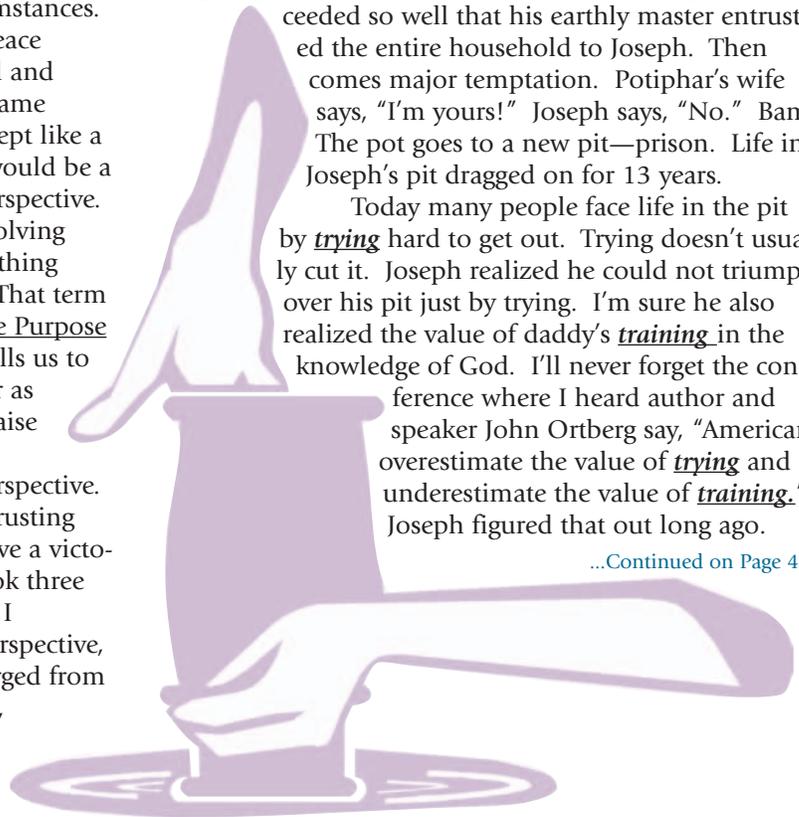
When I'm counseling, most of my clients hear this speech on perspective: How many cameras are rolling when film directors make a movie? Many! Why? To look at a scene from different perspectives. There's tremendous power and possibility thinking for the pot when you change your perspective on the pit.

### The Triumph of Training

A vowel can easily change pit to pot, but it takes far more effort for humans to make that switch. Joseph went from a literal pit in Israel to a figurative pit as an Egyptian slave. Yet in the Potter's hands, this pot succeeded so well that his earthly master entrusted the entire household to Joseph. Then comes major temptation. Potiphar's wife says, "I'm yours!" Joseph says, "No." Bam. The pot goes to a new pit—prison. Life in Joseph's pit dragged on for 13 years.

Today many people face life in the pit by trying hard to get out. Trying doesn't usually cut it. Joseph realized he could not triumph over his pit just by trying. I'm sure he also realized the value of daddy's training in the knowledge of God. I'll never forget the conference where I heard author and speaker John Ortberg say, "Americans overestimate the value of trying and underestimate the value of training." Joseph figured that out long ago.

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# SINKING STINKING THINKING

-By Linda Easter, M.C., L.P.C.

*What floats your boat on life's mental sea? For many, negative thinking drifts afloat our mental waters far more easily than positive thinking. This stinking thinking results in persistent discouragement rather than the abundant life Christ came to bring.*

A man named Hans Selye researched stinking thinking. He concluded that depressed people commonly focus on negative thoughts about self, the world, and the future. Sinking such stinking thinking produces great benefits. Do you realize you can actually change your life by changing your mind?

God calls us to this when He says, "Repent." The literal root definition of repent means: change your

mind. When negative thinking covers our mental waters like a huge Alaskan oil slick, we miss many possibilities that God wants to bubble up and brightly float on life's potentially sparkling waters. But take note. Changing your mind is a process. It takes time. It also requires hard work. Commit to retraining your mind and practice the following suggestions:

## 1. BECOME AWARE

The basic sinful nature of humans since "the fall" tends to promote far more negative than positive thinking. Our culture reinforces this. Sensationally negative news sells, and it is everywhere. Such factors condition our brain to accept negativity as the norm. To change to a more positive mindset, you must think about your thinking. You'll find stinking thinking racing through your mental waters like a jetski, drowning positive thoughts in its wake. Recognize how much, how fast, and how often this occurs.

## 2. PRAY

Paul tells us in Philippians 4:5-7 that God is near so we don't have to be anxious about anything. Sounds extreme, huh? But it's what the Bible says. We are to go to him, requesting our prayers and petitions with thanksgiving. He promises to answer those prayers with a peace that transcends all understanding, which guards our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Realize that He doesn't usually wash through your mind to flood out stinking thinking, leaving you totally blank. Instead, prayer provides His strength and power to accomplish the God-directed, plodding, necessary work of changing your mind. Schedule times of concentrated prayer, asking His Holy Spirit's guidance. Also train yourself to frequently pray "breath" prayers, praying short scripture promises and "Lord, help me" type prayers throughout your day.

## 3. PRACTICE POSITIVE THINKING

If you try to sink stinking thinking by just not thinking about it, you could end up in a mental whirlpool. The more you tell yourself, "Don't think about it," the more you do. So *counteract* negative thinking by replacing it with positive thinking. Philippians 4:8 tells us to think about whatever is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, and admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy, think about it. Since this isn't your natural tendency, you will need to intentionally work at practicing thinking positively. It will be difficult at first, like trying to stop a speedboat skimming across the water at full throttle. As you practice more and more, it becomes easier. Be kind, gentle, and forgiving to yourself. Just think about how many years you have been swamped with stinking thinking. This is a process that takes time. In Romans 12:2 Paul tells us that God's word has the power to transform our minds. Getting into His word and learning how to live life from His perspective powerfully helps to sink stinking thinking.

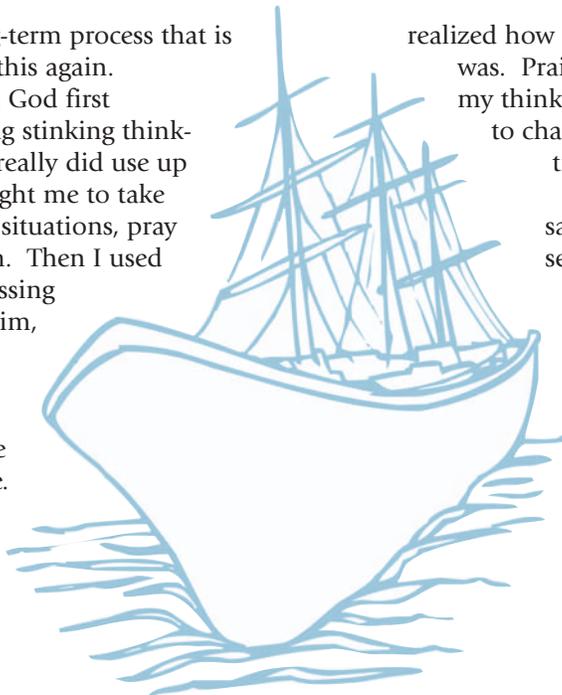
#### 4. USE HEALTHY SELF-TALK

I don't know about you, but I talk to myself constantly. My head always has an internal dialogue going on inside. Many share this characteristic. Others have to cultivate it. Problem is: self-talk is usually as negative as a person's thinking. But as Christians, we have the greatest source of positive self-talk available—God's word. It tells us who we are *in Him*. If I'm thinking of myself negatively, telling myself I am worthless as a human, I now consciously say inside my own head, "I am the daughter of The King." That brings goosepimples and a smile every time I say it. Saying, "His divine power has given me everything I need for life and godliness (II Peter 1:3)," helps me get back on track when I feel like I can't do what God says. The possibilities are endless!

#### 5. WORK AT THANKFULNESS

Remember what Philippians 4:6 says? We bring our prayers and petitions to God with *thanksgiving*. The American culture floods us with messages about our rights and all the things we *should* have. This promotes a strong sense of entitlement rather than thanksgiving. But God says we are to be "overflowing with thanksgiving" and that we should "give thanks in all circumstances." The Bible tells us that all things, from the breath in our lungs—to our abilities and talents—to the things we own, are gifts from God. When we think of ourselves as entitled, we easily sail in stinking thinking, feeling we don't have enough. In the sinful nature as well as American culture, we never have enough. From a godly perspective, we deserve nothing, yet He gives us so much. When we realize God's many gifts in our lives, we become more grateful people. The grand finale of these gifts—living eternal life in heaven—is a future gift all Christians look forward to. I suggest to people I counsel that they make a game of thankfulness, using silly, simple things. I have conditioned myself to do this so that even in my deepest grouchy state, I can say, "Thank you God that my toes still wiggle, my knees still bend, and my eyes still cross." That pretty near always floats a smile on my face and a thankful state of mind, so that I appreciate God and all He does.

I already said this is a long-term process that is hard work. I must emphasize this again. But oooh the reward!! When God first brought my attention to sinking stinking thinking, he picked one aspect that really did use up a lot of my mind time. He taught me to take each of these types of negative situations, pray about it, and commit it to Him. Then I used the time I would have spent fussing about the situation to praise Him, to meditate on His word, or to think on something true, noble, right, pure, lovely, or admirable. This was one of the hardest things I have ever done. But I knew He was telling me to do it, and I wanted to walk in obedience. It eventually became easier. About three months later, I finally



realized how much more peaceful my mind was. Praise God, it positively affected both my thinking and emotions. God continues to channel me to other aspects of negative thinking to clean them up.

His word says He will do the same for all who commit themselves to the challenge of sinking stinking thinking and changing their mind towards His positive heavenly perspective. When people have trouble beginning this process, God often brings them to me at Peaceful Hearts Counseling Services to help them get started and encourage them onward in His direction.



In his pit, Joseph didn't just try. He took a godly perspective and, using his knowledge of God, trained himself to act like a godly man at all times.

*Trying* is defined as "making an effort, attempting," while *training* means "instruction or practice that makes one proficient." When you try, you give it your best shot one to several times. If it doesn't work? Well, you tried, right? What more could anyone ask? But training is a connected sequence of tries with the commitment to keep trying again and again and again and again until you succeed. Pushing yourself. Persevering. Making a new habit. Letting the Potter mold and shape you in the pit so that you emerge as a stronger, more resilient pot conformed to the likeness of the Potter's Son, Jesus.

During my three years in the pit, trust was a major issue. Change stripped away the security that made life *feel* stable. I had previously tried to trust God in the ups and downs of life, feeling successful. But I never before had to actually believe for what I could not see. The future was a question mark. Could God take care of us? I knew God's call: time for trust training camp. The Faithful Potter molded this pot through lessons about changing negative thinking to faith, believing He was working all things for my good; substituting meditation on His word for worry; relaxing and taking one day at a time; forgiving (as God had forgiven me) those who had hurt me, even though the sense of betrayal was sometimes shattering; and focusing on my conviction from the Scriptures that no matter how crazy life seemed, He was in control and knew what He was doing. When I slipped back into the pain perspective, training felt so difficult. But when I regained the godly perspective, realizing this life is about Him rather than just me, I found it much easier to do the work of training. As training continued, the godly perspective became my "norm." Now as the pot looks back to the pit, I feel a sense of enormous gratitude for how I've grown.

When I'm counseling, I ask most clients, "If I took you to a gym and maxed you out with the amount of weight you could lift, then added 50 pounds, could you lift it?" The expected answer is no. "If you went to the gym and trained on the weights, by the end of six months, do you think you could lift the extra 50 pounds?" Usually they agree. They probably could. Trying has its merits, but when life is tough for the pot, only training results in triumph over the pit.

## Conclusion

Vowels are handy dandy little things that bring lots of flexibility to the English language. A bunch of consonants can do a lot of work with just a handful of vowels. Pit and pot provide a great example. But don't forget. When you're in the pit, recognizing your flexibility really helps the pot. Choose your perspective and choose to train yourself to live from that perspective. Conquer life's pits through the amazing power of a godly perspective, and content yourself as a well-shaped pot through the triumph of training.

# THE PEACEFUL HEART

by Linda Easter

How to describe the peaceful heart?  
Can words achieve that goal?  
When God descends in holy love  
And fills the empty hole.  
He cancels out the world's cruel stains  
That wound and blacken soul.  
He blots away the tears and pain  
That through the years take toll.  
He comes to live within our lives  
And gently gains control.  
He heals our hurts and calms our fears  
And starts to make us whole.

He sends Christ Jesus to our hearts  
And we are born again.  
He brings the peace of spirit-filled life,  
This wondrous Son of Man.



## About Linda Easter

Linda Easter serves as a Licensed Professional Counselor helping clients with varying needs gain direction and insight in times of need.

Linda is a 1998 graduate from Kutztown University with a Master of Arts degree and a Specialty in Marriage and Family Therapy. Her multidisciplinary background has given her the knowledge and experience to counsel in a variety of settings. Some of the organizations that have used Linda's counseling services have included Foster Care, Community Agencies, and a State Prison. She practices as a clinical therapist and a behavior specialist, having spent thousands of hours counseling people of all ages, for many different mental and emotional health issues.

Before her "professional" life, Linda concentrated on raising her three children, and as a pastor's wife, she also served her community in the church. Her many responsibilities included teaching Sunday and Vacation Bible School, and fulfilling the roles of soloist, music minister and choir director.

She acted as a liaison to the denomination and served on many church committees. Linda was able to attend numerous seminary courses with her husband during his formal education for the pastorate.

One of her defining experiences for nearly 10 consecutive years, was spending summer weeks in the Poconos at Church Camp for ages 8 to 16. As assistant director, she guided preteens and teens through their daily activities and often provided a listening ear. Linda's personal and professional experiences have allowed her to offer counseling services incorporating Christian beliefs for those that choose this path. She currently offers counseling services either at her office in Hamburg, PA or travels on-site.