

Killing ANTs
A Systematic Way to Extinguish
Pesky and Damaging
ANTs (Automatic Negative Thoughts)



Designed and Compiled

by

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Killing ANTs

Have you ever been on a picnic and felt something crawling on your leg? You look down and, sure enough, it is an ant. Annoying little thing. If there are enough of them on you or your blanket you will probably move to another location to avoid the bothersome creatures. Or maybe you are working in the yard and suddenly fire ants begin stinging you in unison as if one of them had sounded an alarm, “Sting the giant!”

Another type of pesky critter that often bothers or stings us is also called an ANT; *Automatic Negative Thought*. Do you ever experience these? Seemingly, without even thinking about it, you have a negative thought.

Let me back up a little and explain. Over the past few years of facilitating prayer ministry, I noticed that many of my clients had way too many negative thoughts. They would make statements like: “I can’t do anything right. I am a failure. No body loves me.”

I would turn to my Bible and read 2 Corinthians 10:5b to them, “...and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.” I would follow by reading Philippians 4:8, “Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things.”

It seemed pretty clear to me. Just take those negative, destructive, corrosive thoughts, lay them at the feet of Jesus and your thinking would improve. However, since most people do not “**think about their thinking**” that will probably never happen. If we would take some time to think about our thoughts we should be able to shift our thinking to something positive, happy and joyful.

Many have a distorted belief system, believing lies that have been planted in our minds by the evil one. Accompanying our lie-based-thinking are toxic emotions that impact the way we think and behave. When we are stressed, depressed, angry, anxious, or feeling guilty, we become prone to misinterpret events and to think in a distorted way. One distorted thought tends to lead to another and, before long, we are trapped in a downward spiral. These intrusive distortions might also be called irrational, twisted, or unrealistic thought patterns. When our negative self talk flows like battery acid, our choices and decision making are usually not healthy or holy. Since our thoughts create our moods, we need to “think about our thinking.” How healthy is your thinking? If your thoughts are toxic or unholy you need to shift your thinking patterns. Romans 12:2 tells us to “...be transformed by the renewing of your mind...” You need to replace the lies you believe with the truth of Christ.

I thought I was communicating very clearly how to shift one’s thoughts, but it was just not working. Something was missing. After reading Daniel Amen’s book entitled, Change Your Brain Change your Life, I found a systematic way to move from negative thinking to positive thinking. This does not replace the healing that needs to take place in our hearts to remove the

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lies we believe—our lie-based-thinking, but the implications are life-giving. The following information is taken from Dr. Amen’s chapter entitled “Enhancing Positive Thought Patterns and Strengthen Connections.” Let’s follow the system for killing ANTs and see what happens to our thinking.

Amen writes, “Our overall state of mind has a certain tone or flavor based largely on the types of thoughts we think... People who are depressed have one dispiriting thought following another. When they look at the past, they feel regret. When they look at the future, they feel anxiety and pessimism. In the present moment, they are bound to find something unsatisfactory. The lens through which they see themselves, others, and the world has a dim grayness. They are suffering from automatic negative thoughts, or ANTs. ANTs are cynical, gloomy, and complaining thoughts that just seem to keep marching.”

Here are some examples of typical ANTs:

“I know I won’t pass that test on Friday.”

“You never listen to me.”

“Just because we had a good year in business doesn’t mean anything.”

“You don’t like me.”

“I should have done much better. I’m a failure.”

“I’m just stupid.”

“It’s your fault.”

Here is a step by step method to change your thinking principles and change your brain.

Steps for Killing ANTs

Step 1

Realize that your thoughts are real:

- You have a thought.
- Your brain releases chemicals.
- An electrical transmission goes across your brain.
- You become aware of what you are thinking.

Thoughts are real and they have a real impact on how you feel and how you behave. Did you know that every thought you have sends electrical signals throughout your brain?

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Step 2

Notice how negative thoughts affect your body.

Every time you have an angry thought, an unkind thought, a sad thought, or a cranky thought, your brain releases chemical that make you feel bad. Think about the last time you were mad. How did your body feel? When most people are angry, their muscles become tense, their heart beats faster, their hands start to sweat, and they may even begin to feel a little dizzy. Your body reacts to every negative thought you have..

Step 3

Notice how positive thoughts affect your body.

Every time you have a good thought, a joyful thought, a happy thought, a hopeful thought, your brain releases chemicals that make your body feel good. Think about the last time you had a really happy thought. How did your body feel? When most people are happy, their muscles relax, their hearts beat more slowly, their hands become dry, and they breath more slowly.

Step 4

Notice how your body reacts to every thought you have.

Your body reacts to your thoughts. Your heart rate, pulse pressure, perspiration, breathing rate and muscle tension can be impacted by your thoughts. The reactions take place almost immediately. Our brain translates our emotional state into physical feelings or relaxation or tension.

Step 5

Think of bad thoughts as pollution.

Thoughts are very powerful. They can make your mind and your body feel good, or they can make you feel bad. Every cell in you body is affected by every thought you have. This is why when people get emotionally upset, they frequently develop physical symptoms such as headaches or stomachaches. Some research indicates that one who has a lot of negative thoughts has a better chance of developing cancer. If you can flood your mind with good healthy thoughts you will feel better.

A negative thought is like pollution in your system. Just has pollution in the Los Angeles basin affects everyone who goes outside, so, too, do negative thoughts pollute the brain's limbic system, your mind and you body.

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Step 6

Understand that your automatic thoughts don't always tell the truth.

Unless you think about your thoughts, they are automatic, “they just happen.” But if your thoughts just happen, they are not necessarily correct. Your thoughts do not always tell the whole truth. Sometimes they even lie to you. If we believe lies that were planted into our memory as if they were true, they may as well be true. Think about your thinking!

Step 7

Talk back to ANTs.

Once you think about your thinking and learn about your thoughts, you can train yourself to choose good thoughts and feel better, or you can choose to think about bad thoughts and feel lousy. That's right, it's up to you. It is your choice.

One way to change your thoughts is to notice them when they are negative and talk back to them. When you think a negative thought without challenging it, your mind believes it and your body reacts to it.

Step 8

Exterminate the ANTs.

Think of the negative thoughts that invade your mind like ants that bother you at a picnic. One negative thought, like one ant at a picnic, is not a big problem. Two or three negative thoughts, like two or three ants at a picnic, become more irritating. Ten or twenty negative thoughts, like ten or twenty ants at a picnic, may cause you to pick up and leave. Whenever you notice these automatic negative thoughts, or ANTs, you need to crush them as quickly as they pop up. They can ruin your relationships, your self esteem and your personal power. One way to crush them is to write them down and talk back to them. When you write down negative thoughts and talk back to them, you take away their power and you feel better. Remember, not all thoughts that go through your mind are the truth. It is important to check your thoughts out before you just believe them.

Nine Different Species of ANTs

When you identify the type of ANT you are thinking, you begin to take away the power it has over you. Some ANTs are designated as red, because they are particularly harmful.



ANT 1: “Always/never” thinking. This happens when you think something that happened will “always” repeat itself or that you will “never” get what you want. One might say “I am never satisfied” implying that they will never be satisfied. All-or-nothing words like “always, never, no one, every one, every time, and everything” are usually wrong. Here are some examples of “always/never” thinking:

“He’s always putting me down.”
“No one will ever call me.”
“No one will ever love me.”
“Everyone takes advantage of me.”
“My children never listen to me.”

“Always/never” ANTs are very common. If you catch yourself thinking in these absolutes, stop and make yourself recall examples that disprove this kind of thinking.



ANT # 2: (Red ant) Focusing on the negative. This occurs when your thoughts reflect only on the bad in a situation and ignore any of the good. Try to look for the good in a situation. Here are some examples of focusing on the negative.

“It is going to rain today.”
“He struck out.”



ANT # 3: (Red ant) Fortune-telling. This is where you predict the worst possible outcome in a situation. When you predict bad things, you may help make them happen. Suppose you are driving home from work. You predict that the house will be a wreck and no one will be interested in seeing you. By the time you get home you are ready for a fight. If you see one thing out of place or no one comes running to the door, you are likely to explode and ruin the rest of your evening. Fortune-telling ANTs hurt your chances for feeling good. Here are some examples:

“The whole class will laugh at me.”
“I will fail this test.”
“My wife will not love me.”



ANT # 4: (Red ant) Mind reading. This happens when you believe you know what others are thinking even when they haven't told you. Mind reading is a common cause of trouble between people. You can't read anyone else's mind. You never know what someone else is thinking unless they tell you. A negative look from someone else might mean they are simply preoccupied or worried about something. When there are things that you don't understand, ask about them to clarify them. Here are some examples:

"She is mad at me."
 "He doesn't like me."
 "They were talking about me."



ANT # 5: Thinking with your feelings. This occurs when you believe your negative feelings without ever questioning them. Feelings are very complex and often based on powerful memories from the past. Feelings sometimes lie to you. Much of our present lie-based feeling comes from our lie-based thinking from the past. They are not always about the truth. They are just feelings. Many people believe their feelings even though they have no evidence for them. When you have a strong negative feeling check it out. Think about your thinking. Here are some examples:"

"I feel as if you don't love me."
 "I feel like I am stupid."
 "I feel worthless."
 "I feel like a failure."
 "I feel like you do not trust me."



ANT # 6: Beating yourself up with guilt. Guilt is not a helpful emotion. Guilt often causes you to do things you don't want to do. Guilt beating occurs when you use words like "*should, ought, must, or have to.*" Guilt isn't productive. Here are some examples:

"I ought to spend more time at home."
 "I must spend more time with my kids."
 "I have to organize my office."
 "I should exercise more."



ANT # 7: Labeling. Whenever you attach a negative label to yourself or to someone else, you stop your ability to take a clear look at the situation. These are very harmful, because whenever you call yourself or someone else a jerk or arrogant, you lump that person (in your mind) with all the "jerks" of the world. Here are some examples:

"I am stupid."
 "She is a b-."
 "He is an idiot."



ANT # 8: Personalizing. Personalizing occurs when you invest events with personal meaning. You never fully know why people do what they do. Try not to personalize the behaviors of others. Here are some examples:

“My wife did not talk to me this morning. She must be mad at me.”

“My son got into an accident with the car. I should have spent more time teaching him how to drive. It was my fault.”

“My son is doing drugs. I should have taught him better. It is my fault.”



ANT # 9: Blaming. (The most poisonous red ant.) It is when we blame someone else for our problems. Blaming is very harmful. When you blame something or someone else for the problems in your life, you become a passive victim of circumstance and you make it extremely difficult to do anything to change the situation. Many relationships are ruined by people who blame their parents or their spouse when things go wrong. They take little responsibility for their problems. They rarely admit to their own problems. Typically you will hear statements like:

“It wasn’t my fault that...”

“That wouldn’t have happened if you would have...”

“You made me angry.”

“If only you had done (something different) it would not have happened.”

Your thoughts really matter. They can either hurt or help you. Left unchecked, ANTs will infect your whole being. Whenever you notice ANTs, you need to crush them or they will affect your relationships, your work and your entire life. First you need to notice them. If you can catch them at the moment they occur and correct them, you take away the power that they have over you. When a negative thought goes unchallenged, your mind believes it and your body reacts to it.

When you feel a negative thought entering your mind, train yourself to write it down. Talk back to it, which will take away its power. Think about your thinking. Shift your thoughts. Make them captive to Jesus and watch what happens.

“Watch your thoughts, for they will become your words. Choose your words, for they become actions. Understand your actions, for they become habits. Study your habits, for they will become your character. Develop your character, for it becomes your destiny.”

John Hagee

Summary of ANT Species

1. **“Always/never thinking:** thinking in words like always, never, no one, everyone, every time, everything.
2. **Focusing on the negative:** seeing only the bad in a situation
3. **Fortune telling:** predicting the worst possible outcome in a situation
4. **Mind reading:** believing you know what others are thinking
5. **Thinking with your feelings:** believing negative feelings without ever questioning them
6. **Guilt beating:** beating yourself up with words like should, must, ought, or have to
7. **Labeling:** attaching a negative label to yourself or someone else. “I am stupid.”
8. **Personalizing:** investing events with personal meaning
9. **Blaming:** blaming someone else for your own problems








Kill the ANTs Exercise

This exercise is for whenever you feel anxious, nervous, depressed, fearful or frazzled.

Here are some examples of how to kill Automatic Negative Thoughts ANTs:



ANTs	Species of ANT	Kill the ANT
 <p>You never listen to me.</p>	<p>Thinking</p>	<p>I get frustrated when you don't listen to me, but I know you have listened to me and will again.</p>
 <p>My boss doesn't like me.</p>	<p>Mind Reading</p>	<p>I don't know that. Maybe she is just having a bad day. Bosses are people, too.</p>
 <p>The whole class will laugh at me.</p>	<p>Fortune-telling</p>	<p>I don't know that. Maybe they'll really like my speech.</p>
 <p>I am stupid.</p>	<p>Labeling</p>	<p>Sometimes I make poor choices, but I am not stupid.</p>
 <p>It is your fault that we have these marital problems.</p>	<p>Blaming</p>	<p>I need to examine my part in this problem and look for ways I can make the situation better.</p>

Your turn: Event: Write out the event that is associated with your negative thoughts and feelings.

ANT	SPECIES	KILL THE ANT
(Write out the automatic negative thought)	(Identify the type of irrational thought.)	Talk back to the irrational thought. Give the thought to Jesus)
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