

Next Level Thinking

10 Powerful Thoughts for a Successful
and Abundant Life

Joel Osteen



New York Nashville

ALSO BY JOEL OSTEEN

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for Your Good**

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Next Level Thinking

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CHAPTER ONE

Be a Barrier Breaker

So often we let our environment, how we were raised, and other people's expectations of us set the limits for our life. We adapt to what's around us. If you take an oak tree seed and plant it in a two-foot pot, that oak tree will never become what it was created to be if you leave it in the pot—not because there's something wrong with the seed, but because of the environment that it's in. It's so easy to just fit in, to go with the crowd, to be like everyone else. But God didn't create you to be average. He created you to stand out, to go beyond the norm, to leave your mark on this generation. You have seeds of greatness on the inside. You're supposed to go further than the people who raised you. You're supposed to live better, be more successful, and set a new standard. You may

be in an environment where people have addictions, low self-esteem, depression, and poverty. You can't stop that. But here's the key: Don't let that become normal in your thinking. If you accept that as who you are, it will keep you from your destiny.

The Scripture speaks of how we are *in* the world, but we are not *of* the world. You may be *in* a limited environment, but you don't have to be *of* it. Don't let that environment get in you. If you see struggle, lack, and poverty long enough, your mind can become conditioned to thinking, *This is who I am. I'll always struggle. I'll never have enough.* No, that's where you are, that's not who you are. That may be what's been normal. The good news is, you're a barrier breaker. You have the power, the favor, the talent, and the ability to break out and go further. God breathed His life into you. He calls you the head and not the tail. Don't let your mind become conditioned for mediocrity. Don't let that change who you really are.

Sometimes people will try to put us in a box. They'll tell us such things as, "You can't start that business. You don't have the resources. You'll never afford a nice place to live, never get well, never meet the right person." Because their thinking is limited, they'll try to put their limitations on you. You have to

put your foot down and say, “I refuse to be mediocre because people around me are mediocre. I refuse to be addicted, depressed, and have low expectations. I know that I’m a barrier breaker. I’m going to set a new standard.”

It starts in your thinking. Nothing will change until you make up your mind that you are not going to accept mediocrity. Why don’t you take the limitations off yourself? You have so much potential. Break out of that box and try something new. The enemy would love to keep that potential from ever coming out. He’ll use bad breaks, negative comments, people, and circumstances to try to keep you from believing in yourself, from believing that you can rise to the next level. Many people have let their mind become conditioned to thinking they’ve reached their limits, they’re just average, they’ll never do anything great. What’s happened? Instead of breaking out, they’ve adapted to their environment.

Nothing will change until you make up your mind that you are not going to accept mediocrity.

Take the Limitations Off

I saw a study that was done with fleas. Researchers put fleas in a container and then put a lid on the top. The fleas immediately tried to jump out, but they hit the lid again and again. Before long they realized they were stuck. At one point the researchers removed the lid, but, much to their surprise, the fleas didn't try to jump out anymore. They had hit that lid so many times that they had become conditioned to thinking they couldn't get out. Even though the lid was off, they didn't even try.

Sometimes, as with these fleas, because of the environment we're in, the times we've tried and failed, and what people have told us, we've become conditioned to thinking, *I can't do anything great. I'll never accomplish my dream. I'll never get back in shape.* It might not have happened in the past, you might have tried and hit that lid a few times, but can I tell you the lid is coming off? It's time to try again. You were not created to live contained, to get stuck. Recondition your mind.

That's what happened to a friend of mine. He got off to a rough start in life. He grew up in the

projects, was very poor, and had almost no guidance. His father wasn't in his life, and his mother had her own struggles. Because of this poor home situation, he was labeled by the state as a "child at risk." From the time he was a little boy, that phrase had played over and over in his mind. It had become ingrained in his thinking: *There's no future for me. I'm a child at risk.* He continued to go downhill, getting into trouble, doing what the rest of the crowd was doing. Everyone around him was defeated, depressed, and addicted. He fit right in. He adapted to his environment. Your life is going to follow your thoughts. He believed he was at risk, and he became at risk. If you believe you've reached your limits, you have. If you believe you'll never get well, you won't. Because your mind has become conditioned with limitations, it will keep you from your highest potential.

You have to be bold and get rid of the thoughts that are holding you back. You may not see how you can do it in your own ability, but you're not on your own. You have the most powerful force in the universe breathing in your direction. God created you to rise higher, to break barriers of the past, to overcome bad habits, and to be free from generational curses. People may have labeled you at risk, average,

less than, but God labels you well able, equipped, anointed, creative, a masterpiece. The good news is that people don't determine your destiny; God does. What they said about you, the environment you're in now, and how you were raised cannot keep you from your purpose. God has already taken into account every detail of your life—every bad break, every negative comment, how you were raised, what somebody did or didn't do. He's factored that all into His plan. If you stay in faith, instead of holding you back, it will propel you forward. Instead of defeating you, it will make you stronger. God knows how to take what was meant for your harm and use it to your advantage.

One day this young man got into trouble at school and was sent to the school counselor. She tried to reason with him, but he wouldn't listen. However, she wouldn't give up. She kept on trying and trying. Finally he said to her, "Why are you even bothering with me? I'll never do anything great. I've been told my whole life I'm a child at risk." She looked him in the eyes and said, "Listen to me: you are not a child at risk; you are a child at possibility." When he heard that, something ignited on the inside. He sat up in his chair and said to her, "What do you mean

‘at possibility?’” She said, “You are full of potential. You are smart, you are talented. There’s so much you can become.”

“Listen to me: you are not a child at risk; you are a child at possibility.”

His whole life, he’d heard just the opposite. His mind had become conditioned to thinking, *I’ll never get out of the projects. I’ll never be successful.* That day a stronghold was broken in his thinking. He reconditioned his mind.

Today, this young man owns his own business and is very successful. Plus, he goes around to schools and speaks to other students who are considered to be at risk. He tells them what that counselor told him: “You’re not at risk; you’re at possibility.” As it was with my friend, people around you may accept mediocrity. They may be fine with being average, having little goals, working at an “okay” job. But don’t let that spirit rub off on you. That’s not who you are. You’re the exception. You’re a barrier breaker. You are not limited by your education, by how you were raised, by that environment. God has destined you to rise higher. He’s destined you to go to the next level.

Become a Barrier Breaker

This is what happened with my father. He grew up in a very poor family on a cotton farm in Paris, Texas, during the Great Depression. At Christmastime, his family was the one that received the Christmas basket that went to the poorest family in the school. He was never allowed to drink a full glass of milk, because they couldn't afford it. They could only have a fourth of a glass, and they'd pour water in it to make it last longer. But when he was seventeen years old, my dad was the first one in the family to give his life to Christ, and he also made another major decision about his future. He told me, "Joel, I decided on that day that my children would never be raised in the poverty and lack that I was raised in." He changed his mind. The people around him were good people, but they were limited. Their minds had become conditioned to accept not having enough, to always struggle and lack. The problem is that if you accept it as your way of life, you won't do anything about it. It's easy to get comfortable with mediocrity and just adapt to your environment.

But when he was a teenager, my father felt something

stirring on the inside. It was those seeds of greatness. All the circumstances of his life said he was stuck. He'd have to stay on the farm and pick cotton the rest of his life. But instead of adapting to that environment, his attitude was, *This is not my destiny. I can rise above this. I refuse to live in mediocrity, wearing hand-me-downs, receiving the Christmas basket. I know I have seeds of greatness. I have potential. I have creativity. The Most High God breathed life into me.* As a teenager, he left the farm. He had to hitchhike to do it, but he went out and started ministering in the jails, in senior citizens' homes, and in schools, making a difference wherever he went. He broke the curse of poverty in our family and took us to a new level. He was a barrier breaker. He knew he was made for more.

Instead of just fitting into your environment and being like everyone else, why don't you start seeing yourself as a barrier breaker, as the exception? You're supposed to stand out. You're supposed to rise higher. Maybe everyone in your family is depressed except you. You broke out. You're happy. You're full of joy. Everyone is addicted except you. You're free. You're clean. You're helping others. Everyone is struggling, can't make ends meet, and can't get ahead except you.

You're blessed. Good breaks are chasing you down. Opportunities are looking for you. Your gifts and talents are coming out in greater ways. Why is that? You're the exception. You're not arrogant, you don't think you're better than someone else, but you have a quiet confidence, knowing that you were made for more.

If my father had accepted that poverty and a limited education was his lot in life, I wouldn't be where I am today. Are you accepting things that are less than God's best? Have you adapted to a limited environment? You have big dreams in your heart. You know there's a new business in you, a management position, a book, a better house, but you're doing as well as your friends. You've gone as far as your family

Are you accepting things that are less than God's best?

has gone in the past. No, don't settle there. Break out of that mold. Nothing will be sadder than to come to the end of life and realize what we could have become

if we had just lived with an at-possibility mind-set instead of an at-risk mentality.

Get Rid of the Excuses

A couple of years before my dad went to be with the Lord, we drove back to his hometown. Daddy wanted to reminisce and show me where he had grown up. We went out onto the land where his farm used to be. The house was no longer there, but we found the well, and he showed me where he used to pick cotton, where he went to school. Before we left the town, we drove around to see if we could find any of his friends. We pulled up to a very run-down house that didn't even look livable. Really, it was nothing more than a shack. There was this older gentleman sitting on the front porch, not wearing a shirt, just killing time. My father went up and said, "I'm John Osteen. Are you So-and-so?" Yes, it was his friend. They hadn't seen each other in over sixty years. This man invited us inside, and the place was very dilapidated. There were buckets on the floor to catch the water leaks from the ceiling, and the broken windows were boarded up. Later we went around and found several of my father's other friends. They were all in the same situation—extreme poverty, defeat, mediocrity.

They were good people, but it hit me how little they had accomplished in their lives. They had made the mistake of accepting the limitations they were born into and then adapting to their environment. One man told how he'd worked a little here and there, worked down at the boat docks and at other odd jobs, barely making it through the years. Another man had been laid off his job twenty-eight years earlier and said he was not able to find any more work, so he lived off handouts, with no goals, no dreams, no resources. Now they were at the end of their lives, having never tapped into their potential.

That day made such an impression upon me. I thought about how my father was raised in the same environment. He came out of the same mold, the same Depression, the same poverty, the same school, but Daddy went on to touch the world and pastored great churches. He made a difference with his life. I saw firsthand what would have happened if my father had accepted the life of defeat he was born into. If he had not put his foot down and said, "I might have been born into mediocrity, but I am not settling here," if he had not reconditioned his mind, he would have been sitting right there with the rest of those men.

Don't go through life and miss your destiny. You weren't created to get stuck, to settle and stay at the same place year after year. You were created to excel. There is potential in you right now just waiting to come out. You have gifts that will cause new doors to open, talent that will bring new opportunities. Get rid of low expectations. Quit making excuses to settle where you are. You may be in a limited environment that includes

If you're going to be a barrier breaker, you have to get rid of excuses.

dysfunction, addictions, and depression. The good news is, you don't have to stay there. That's not your destiny. Somebody may have labeled you "at risk," but the Creator of the universe labels you "at possibility." You've gone as far as your family and your friends—that's good, but don't settle there. You're the exception. You're supposed to go further. Dare to take some steps of faith. Life is flying by. You don't have ten years to wait around. The odds may be against you, but the Most High God is for you. His favor on your life will cause you to go where you could not go on your own. If you're going to be a barrier breaker, you have to get rid of excuses.

Defy the Odds

I read about an eight-year-old boy who grew up in Kansas in the early 1900s. During the winter, he and his brother would go to school early to light the wood fire in the large potbellied stove in the classroom so that it would be warm when the rest of the students arrived. But one day someone accidentally put gasoline in the kerosene container he used to start the wood on fire. The next morning, when he lit the match, there was a huge explosion. His brother was killed instantly. The teacher came running and found this little boy unconscious, with the lower half of his body burned beyond recognition. She pulled him out of the fire thinking he was dead, but somehow he had survived. He'd lost all the flesh on his knees and shins and all the toes on his left foot. His mother was told that if he did make it, he would be crippled, never able to walk again, and the doctors recommended amputating his legs. But this little boy was a fighter. Against all odds, he survived. He made up his mind he was not only going to walk again, but he told everyone that one day he would run again. His favorite Scripture was found in Isaiah 40: "They that wait upon the

Lord will renew their strength. They will run and not be weary, they will walk and not faint.” As an eight-year-old boy, he had a spirit of faith. He believed that he could defy the odds.

Months later he was sent home from the hospital with no movement in his legs. The doctors advised his parents to massage his legs to stretch the muscles and try to restore some suppleness to his lower limbs, which was incredibly painful because of the scar tissue. Every day his mother would take him outside in the wheelchair so he could get some sunshine. One afternoon when she wasn't watching, he grabbed on to the picket fence and pulled himself up. Stake by stake, he began to drag himself along. He did this day after day, teaching himself how to walk again. They didn't have physical therapy for him to go to; he was his own physical therapist. Two years after the accident, he stood up for the first time. Not long after that, he was not only walking, he began to run and became extremely fast. In college, on the track team, he won so many medals he became known as the Kansas Flyer. In 1934, Glenn Cunningham, the young man who had been told he'd never walk again, broke the world record in the mile run.

If you're going to be a barrier breaker, you have to get rid of excuses. Quit thinking about what you didn't get, what you can't do, how the odds are against you. You and God are a majority. You have what you need. You're a barrier breaker. You can defy the odds. You can beat the cancer, you can break the addiction, you can start the new business. You can go further than the experts have told you. As Glenn did, you have to recondition your mind. Instead of dwelling on all the negative things people have said about you, dwell on what God says about you: "I will run and not be weary." Instead of "You can't break that addiction," say "I can do all things through Christ. Whom the Son sets free is free indeed." Instead of "Oh, man, you've reached your limits. This is not for you today," declare that "the path of the righteous gets brighter and brighter. God's plans for me

Instead of dwelling on all the negative things people have said about you, dwell on what God says about you.

are for good and not evil, to give me a future and a hope." Nothing will happen until you change your mind. Glenn could have lain in bed thinking, *Wow, too bad for me. I lost my*

legs. I'll never do anything great. But if he had, we wouldn't be talking about him today.

Are there strongholds keeping you back? Have you adapted to an environment and let what people have said about you set the limits for your life? God is saying, "This is a new day. You're a barrier breaker. I'm going to take you further faster than you've imagined. I'm going to help you set a new standard. You're going to defy the odds." Now do your part. Let this seed take root in your spirit. Don't talk yourself out of it. Get in agreement with God.

Stir Up Seeds of Greatness

For years, experts said that no one would ever be able to run a mile in under four minutes. They studied the human body and thought it would collapse under that much pressure. Scientists said it was not only dangerous to try, but it was literally impossible. But a young man named Roger Bannister didn't believe the negative reports. He didn't let his mind become conditioned to thinking it couldn't be done. In May 1954, he made history by running a mile in under

four minutes. What's interesting is that forty-six days later, someone else broke the four-minute mile. Within ten years, 336 people had run the mile in under four minutes' time. It hadn't happened in all the previous years of track and field history, and now it was happening all the time. Why was that? The barrier was broken in people's minds. For years runners had believed what the experts said. They were convinced in their own thinking that it couldn't happen. Once that barrier was removed, they were able to do things that seemed impossible. Has your mind become conditioned to thinking you can't accomplish your dreams, you can't get well, you'll never break that addiction? If you'll do as Roger did and recondition your mind, start thinking better, believing that you're a can-do person, knowing that you have seeds of greatness, you too will break barriers that you thought were impossible.

And here's the beauty: When you break a barrier, you make it easier for those who come after you. You're paving the way for your children, for your relatives. That's what it means to set a new standard. That's what my dad did. When he broke that curse of poverty, he took our family to a new level. Because he broke that barrier, I was able to start much further

along. When my dad went to be with the Lord, he left us with an eight-thousand-seat auditorium. I could have settled there and thought, *This is okay. I'm doing as well as my parents.* But I did what I'm asking you to do. I stirred up my gifts and said, "God, I know I'm not supposed to stay at the same level as my parents." I took a step of faith, and God opened the door to the former Compaq Center, which is several times larger than our former facility. That's the way it's supposed to be. God is a progressive God. He wants every generation to increase.

When you break a barrier, you make it easier for those who come after you.

There was a young man in the Scripture named Hezekiah who was raised in a very dysfunctional home. His father was King Ahaz of Judah, who set up idols for the people to worship. He was a very hard king and cruel to the people. Because he didn't honor God, the nation went downhill and became very poor. Five different armies came against Judah, and Judah lost every battle. The place was decimated. You would think that Ahaz would have learned his lesson, turned to God, asked for His help, but it was just the opposite. He closed the doors of the temple

and began to sell off sacred treasures. Hezekiah was raised in this environment of compromise, defeat, and mediocrity. He could have turned out like his dad; he could have adapted to that environment. But Hezekiah understood this principle. When he became king, the first thing Hezekiah did, before repairing the roads or getting the economy going, was to reopen the temple. He turned the nation back toward God.

His father chose to compromise and to push people down, but Hezekiah's attitude was, *I might have been born into mediocrity, but I'm not settling here. I'm going to put an end to this generational curse, and I'm going to start a generational blessing.* Hezekiah was a barrier breaker. You may be in some kind of limited environment. If Hezekiah were here today, he would tell you, "You don't have to stay there." How you start is not important. How you finish is what matters. Do yourself and your family a favor. Break out of that mold. Don't pass negative things down to the next generation. You can be the difference maker. You can be the one who sets your family on a course to honoring God, a course of blessing, favor, and victory.

I'm asking you to recondition your mind. Get rid of strongholds that are keeping you back. You're not at risk; you're at possibility. Stir up your seeds

of greatness. Be a barrier breaker. If you do this, I believe and declare God is going to breathe on your life in a new way. You're going to go beyond barriers of the past, overcome obstacles, and accomplish dreams. You're going to become everything God created you to be.