



“Contemplate Positive Things”

Paul’s letter to the Jesus followers living in a Greek city called Philippi presented some practical principles for maintaining the joy of the Lord no matter what.

1. ADOPT THE RIGHT AXIS – A Passion to praise Christ 1

Exalt Christ in everything

2. MAINTAIN THE RIGHT ATTITUDE – A Passion to please Christ 2

Please Christ through sacrificial service

3. PURSUE THE RIGHT AIM – A Passion to pursue Christ 3

Pursue deeper relationship with Christ above all other things

4. PRACTICE THE RIGHT ACTIONS – A Passion to practice Christ 4

Practice Christ-like living.

Paul cited several behaviors that must become a part of our everyday life.

- **Stand firm in the Lord 4:1**
- **Harmonize in the Lord 4:2-3**
- **Rejoice in the Lord always 4:4**
- **Cultivate the Gentleness of the Lord 4:5**
- **Cultivate a life of persistent prayer to the Lord 4:6-7**

Today we focus on the next behavioral admonition that relates both to joy and peace. Negative thinking will disrupt both joy and peace in our lives. Positive meditation stimulates both joy and peace in our lives.

• **Contemplate positive things 4:8**

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Philippians 4:8

We learned peaceful living rests greatly on proper thinking. Paul clearly told the Romans that renewal of our thinking transforms our living.

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. 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 12:1-2

Any transformation in behavior requires a renewal of our thinking. Nearly every issue we battle in life stems from faulty or inadequate thinking. Anxiety stems from negative thinking. Interpersonal conflict stems from selfish thinking. Fear stems from negative thinking. Depression stems from negative thinking. Left unaddressed these patterns of thinking imbed in our personality and trigger responses like anger, fear, anxiety, depression, strive, sensuality, impurity etc.

We imbed negative or errant thinking or we lack eternal perspective. A change in our thinking causes change in our living. Thinking determines direction. In my perpetual efforts to eat healthier, I have tried many things.

This time around I grabbed on to two simple but powerful perspectives. There are certain foods that are poison to my body. Being diabetic, a high sugar and high carbohydrate diet is detrimental to my health. The second is that satisfaction and comfort is not really found in food.

Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings (thinking), for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, which have not benefited those devoted to them. Hebrews 13:9

Inferiority stems from negative thinking about ourselves probably ingrained from childhood experiences and fail to recognize our wealth and worth in Jesus. Faith or trust stems from contemplation of the truth about God.

Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ. Romans 10:17

It is never “blind” faith. It is a decision to trust God based on evidence. God does something in the heart to stimulate that decision to trust but he will not completely circumvent our mind. Even modern society recognizes the need for positive affirmation. The problem with some of the world’s affirmations are not based on reality. I am the greatest. I am the most beautiful person in the world. I am strong. I am successful. Thinking so doesn’t make so. Affirming something that doesn’t correspond with reality fosters delusion. Many remember some who auditioned for American Idol. Just because we think we can sing wonderful doesn’t mean it is true. We can confidently affirm what the Bible says about us. The mind is a powerful thing. What we believe determines how we behave. If I visualize myself as a worthless sinner I will excuse my sinful behavior. If I affirm the fact that God views me a specially called and gifted child of God who indeed does, on occasion, sin, I will continually seek to live up to that image.

God continually calls us to focus on eternal things.

If then (and you have) been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Colossians 3:1-4

The Bible often calls us to regularly meditate on God’s word. Watch what you allow into you mind.

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers;

Meditate on what God says.

but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.

The results

He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers. Psa 1:3

The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the LORD are true, and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward. Psalm 19:7-11

The presence of the principles of God in our thinking promotes the power of God in our living.

I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you. Psalm 119:11

You have heard of the saying, “Garbage in garbage out.”

For those who are according to the flesh set their minds (thinking) on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace... Romans 8:5-6

We must guard against that which pollutes the soul. We must cultivate that which purifies and strengthens the soul. The Bible calls Satan the father of lies. He has mastered the art of packaging lies in phenomenal packages.

It comes packaged in music, movies, art, stories, television shows.

It is a well-known principle that if you repeat a lie often enough and loud enough you can change control people. We get exposed to the world's way of thinking in such a way that they make evil seem normal. Think about the old shows. You never even saw a married couple in the same bed. You rarely saw a belly button exposed. Most of the time you don't even know you have been exposed to a godless way of thinking. Even seemingly innocuous cartoons teach principles contrary to Scripture

Music lyrics slide by our consciousness because we enjoy the music, but the thoughts imbed in our thinking. We live in an age that absolutely denies absolute truth or a divine moral standard. Paul instructed the Corinthians on what to cast out of our mind.

For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For 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 10:3-5

Paul provided the Philippians with a mental health guide on what to allow in. I want to spend some time exploring the various things Paul calls us to focus on.

“Continually contemplate these things”

First, the verb. He used a present imperative. That means a command intended to be continually obeyed. The word translated “think on” communicates the idea of intentional consideration, to reason, meditate, ponder, think about, count on as true or valuable, give them weight in your thought life. The categories in Paul's list are something we should imbed as the compass of our life. This is clearly a representative not exhaustive or definitive list. There is not even a clear distinction between some of them. Five of the eight words are not all that common in Paul's writings. Two are only found in this verse. Interestingly enough, these were virtues aspired to even by the Greek culture. The use of the term “whatever” indicates the comprehensive scope of each category. Any and everything related to what is true, honorable, right, pure, commendable, lovely.

“Think about whatever is true”

The term here indicates that which corresponds to reality. Jesus claimed to be the ultimate determiner of what is real.

"I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me. John 14:6

*And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and **truth**. (John 1:14)*

For I want you to know how great a struggle I have on your behalf and for those who are at Laodicea, and for all those who have not personally seen my face, that their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and attaining to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, resulting in a true knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ Himself, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Colossians 2:1-3

God's word is truth.

Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. John 17:17

The gospel is truth.

We are to seek God's perspective on life in every aspect. We are to focus on what God says is reality. Only Christians can discern truth to its fullest extent. Satan blinds the unbeliever from grasping the truth. We resist Satan by taking up the “belt of truth”. Paul urged Timothy to interact with the unbeliever in such a way that God

would grant repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth and they could escape the snare of the Devil have been held captive to do his will. 2 Tim 3
Contemplate truth not error or speculation.

“Think about whatever is honorable”

This refers to a personal moral excellence that is dignified worthy of honor. One Greek scholar suggests it refers to “that which has the dignity of holiness upon it.” Our culture sees few things as “sacred” today. They find vulgarities and silliness funny. We need to contemplate the honorable things in our world. Paul listed “honorable” as one of the qualifications for church leaders. Contemplate what is honorable not ignoble, vulgar, flippant or cheap.

“Think about whatever is just or right”

Whatever corresponds to God’s standard is just or righteous. It carried the idea of conformity to a divine standard.

And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, “Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations! Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed.” Revelation 15:3-4

We are to think about things pleasing to God not people or the flesh. Contemplate whatever pleases God not violates His revealed standard.

“Think about whatever is pure”

Pure in all aspects; thought, speech and actions. That which is not tainted with evil. It comes from the root meaning “holy” which is the counterpart to righteous. Righteous is absolutely conform to God’s moral law. Holy is to be separated from all that is contrary to God’s moral law. We have heard the phrase, “Get you mind out of the gutter.” This command eliminates that which is smutty, off color, immoral etc.

But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. Ephesians 5:3-4

Contemplate whatever is pure not impure.

“Think about whatever is lovely”

That which is attractive winsome, calls forth love, pleasing. This includes both moral and aesthetic beauty.

all that is beautiful in creation and in human lives” —from a sunset to a symphony to caring for the poor and powerless—all things beautiful. Kent

Contemplate whatever is lovely not repulsive.

“Think about whatever is commendable”

Such that is spoken of highly by other people. Things well spoken. Things fit for God’s hearing.

Let no rotten (worthless) word come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. Ephesians 4:29

Out of the heart the man speaks. Basically, what resides in the mind will eventually come out of the mouth. Guard our thought life in order to harness our talk life. Contemplate what God would commend rather than condemn. The first six flow in a kind of rhythmic pattern. That last two take a slightly different approach and represent a kind of summary of the first six and include anything else not mentioned but would be considered excellent and praiseworthy.

“Since there are things excellent, think on them”

The is the only time Paul used this common term used in Roman culture. The term referred to a variety of categories for a demonstrated excellence. Excellent ground in a field, excellent tool, physical excellence, excellence of a courageous soldier, excellent person, even excellent animals. Anything that recognizes

correspondence to how **God** designed it to function. Contemplate the things that demonstrate excellence not laziness, miss use, corruption, half-hearted, missing the mark.

“Since there are things praiseworthy, think on them”

This term is very like the word for “commendable” above. Paul includes anything that triggers a desire to comment, draw attention to, praise. Think about those things that would draw universal approval and recognition. These are the things that should occupy the bulk of our contemplative life.

Anything at all that is a matter of moral and spiritual excellence, so that it is the proper object of praise, is the right pasture for the Christian mind to graze in. Hendricksen

These are the things we should give continual thought. Anything that falls outside of these parameters should be taken captive to the obedience of Christ and given minimal thought if not completely ejected.

Finally brothers, whatever is contrary to God’s revealed truth, whatever dishonors God or others, whatever is contrary to God’s moral standard, whatever is morally tainted, whatever is repulsive, whatever you could not whole heartedly recommend to others, anything not morally excellent, anything you couldn’t personally celebrate, do not give these things a second thought.”

Paul listed the virtues as that which would enable them...

...to be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life... Philippians 2:15-16

If you put all these together, you get a clear description not only of what Jesus thought but who He was; true, honorable, right, pure, commendable, lovely, excellent and definitely praiseworthy.

What Now!

I have been challenged and challenge you to seriously consider the implications of this call to healthy thinking to my everyday life. Apply the Philippians 4:8 test to my thought life?

What do I allow to enter my mind?

Is it true, honorable, right, pure, commendable, lovely, excellent and praiseworthy.

Is it false, dishonorable, impure, unspeakable, repulsive, not excellent or praiseworthy?

What occupies the bulk of my thought life?

Is it true, honorable, right, pure, commendable, lovely, excellent and praiseworthy.

Is it false, dishonorable, impure, unspeakable, repulsive, not excellent or praiseworthy?