

## "Think About These Things"

I think we've all had occasion to hear the question, "*What were you thinking?*" It's usually *after* you or someone else has done something foolish, dangerous, or hurtful. It's most often spoken in a tone of puzzlement, if not disbelief, flavored with rebuke: "*What were you thinking?*" After contemplating the passage we're looking at this morning, I've come believe this is a question we should learn to ask ourselves in a preventative way in the present tense, and *proactively*: *What are you thinking? What am I thinking?* Last week Barry spoke from **verses 6-7** about prayer and anxiety. **Philippians 4:8-9** follows that theme immediately with an emphasis on how we follow through with prayer by the way we focus our thinking.

**Verses 8-9 tell us...**

- I. **IF WE WANT TO LIVE IN THE PEACE OF GOD  
WE NEED TO WORK ON OUR THINKING.**

The last four words of **verse 8**, *think about these things*, tell us...

- A. **We have both the opportunity and responsibility  
to develop our thinking in godly ways.**

The Greek word translated "*think*" is the word from which we get logic. It means to reason or even to calculate. That's helpful. Sometimes people wrongly believe they cannot control their thinking because they cannot control all their thoughts. But there is a difference. All kinds of thoughts may occur to you. Your thinking is what happens when you observe the thoughts that occur to you and choose what to do with them! If you think Scripture is asking you to never have a negative or naughty thought, you are going to fail and perhaps shrug this important command off as unrealistic. You cannot catch every thought before it occurs to you. But you can develop your thinking in healthy ways..

In one sense, thoughts are to thinking like seeing is to looking. You walk down the beach, and you may not be able to control all you see,

but you can choose what you are going to be looking at. Martin Luther said: "*You cannot keep the birds from flying over your head, but you can keep them from building a nest in your hair.*" He was talking about temptation, but it applies to all our thinking. It helps me to remember that this Greek word is not only used for thinking and reasoning, but it is also the word for counting and calculating. A lot of our thinking is a kind of calculating. We try to add it all up: "Is love worth the risk? Is hope worth having? Is obedience worth the sacrifices? The issue is not just random thoughts that occur to us but the calculating and reasoning we do when we are thinking.

**B. The power to guide your thinking comes from the Holy Spirit.  
The process requires your daily choices.**

In **Philippians 2:13**, we read that *God is at work in us both to will and to work for his good pleasure*. To grow more healthy spiritually in our thinking is not something we achieve simply by anxious striving. The Holy Spirit helps you as you ask for his help, and work with him as he works within you.

*To change your pattern of thinking, you have to do two things.*

Imagine your mind as a perfectly smooth hill of earth. The rain begins to fall. As the rain falls at first, it just flows off in all different directions. But after a while, there begin to be little channels that form where the raindrops have run down the side of the hill. Now the rain tends to flow into the channels that have already been dug. Soon the channels get deeper, and more of the water flows into those same channels, making them deeper and wider still. That's how the mind works. As you think in certain ways, you begin to develop certain patterns of thinking. Your thinking very naturally flows into those same old patterns and paths.

*First, you have to stop the old ways of thinking.* You have to notice and, in a sense, build a dam that stops that old flow and pattern.

In an article about our thought life this week, I read one woman's reflection on her own inner thought. I'm just going to read her words:

*"Here are some highlights, or lowlights, from just 17 minutes in one woman's day as she drove home from a convenience store: She conjures up three comebacks she could have hurled at Ellen... She spots the baby shower invitation on the dashboard and schemes a way to be out of town... She sizes up a woman standing at the bus stop and judges her... She reviews the morning's argument with her husband and plans the evening installment. ... An inner voice tells her to turn off the radio and pray, but she decides it's the voice of legalism. She is angry at God because here she is, a Christian and broke, while her good-for-nothing heathen of a brother is rolling in dough. She tries to pray but doesn't get past "Our Father..."*

*If you were to ask the lady... what she had been thinking about on the drive from town, she would say, 'Oh, nothing in particular.' And she would not be lying. Imagine believing we don't need a Savior."*

Yes, honest reflection on our thought lives reveals that we need a Savior but also that we have much room for growth, and it begins with asking the Holy Spirit to help and then beginning to identify and stop those well-worn paths of unhealthy thinking.

In the poetic books of the Hebrew Bible, the biblical writer says, don't be like the beast that perishes. In other words, don't act as if you just have instincts or reactions. God has given you the power to think. You can challenge your present patterns and reroute them. **Ephesians 4:17-18** says, *Now this I say and testify in the Lord that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. <sup>18</sup> They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to their hardness of heart.* At the heart of our human problem is futile thinking, darkened understanding. From the beginning of the Bible story, the very first and most ancient temptation and sin is precipitated by a lie that is believed to be true. All human sin and all of our toxic emotions are precipitated by lies that we're believing. Renounce the lies.

Then....

Second, You have to do is reroute those thoughts. That's what **verse 8** is telling you to do when it says to start thinking consciously and intentionally about the things that are *true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent, and praiseworthy.*

This theme runs through the whole Bible. **Proverbs 4:18-23** *But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until full day. <sup>19</sup> The way of the wicked is like deep darkness; they do not know over what they stumble. <sup>20</sup> My son, be attentive to my words; incline your ear to my sayings. <sup>21</sup> Let them not escape from your sight, keep them within your heart. <sup>22</sup> For they are life to those who find them, and healing to all their flesh. <sup>23</sup> Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.* Consider the imagery there. Maybe you feel trapped in dark intrusive thoughts and patterns of thinking. Even beginning to change your thinking through Scripture can be like the dawning of a new day. With every step forward, the light shines brighter.

Notice the focus is not negative but positive. In the movie *Inception*, there is a scene in which one character explains that it isn't difficult to plant thoughts in the minds of people. He uses this example he says, *"Here's me planting an idea in your head. I say to you, don't think about elephants, and what are you thinking about?"* The other person says, *"Elephants."* The point is that when you focus on trying to not think about something, you're continually reminded of the very thing you don't want to think about. You can end up too focused on it. On the other hand, if we faithfully seek to grow in a more godly and positive Christ-centered focus, we find that evil is overcome, by the good.

*That's what we see here when you look at **verse 8** in light of the whole book of Philippians, that's really what it is saying.*

## **II. WE NEED TO PRACTICE GOOD, GOSPEL-DRENCHED, POSITIVE THINKING.**

**1st. Think about what's true.** Think about the goodness, grace, love, and wisdom of God. Think about God's word and his promises to you.

**2nd. Think about what is honorable.** The word "*honorable*" translates a Greek word that describes something of serious depth and dignity. There is a book out now titled *The Shallows: what the Internet is doing to our brains*. The author uses an interesting image. He says quote once, He was like a scuba diver exploring the depths in a sea of words, and now He zips along the surface like a guy on a jet ski. To the degree that we remain shallow people just coping with life instead of reflecting deeply and thinking about that which is honorable, we will miss the deeper, more truthful life into which God is calling us.

**3rd. Think about what is just.** The word "just" can also be translated as "right." Sometimes instead of thinking about what is right, we think about what is comfortable, pleasant, easy, or popular. What is right?

**4th. Think about what is pure.** Purity is the opposite of hypocrisy, insincerity, mixed motives, and manipulative relationships. It is simple, sincere, and single-minded. The Prayer of **Psalm 51** is a good one, "*Create in me a clean heart, O God.*" On this side of heaven, we're going to struggle, but the Holy Spirit helps us if we keep fighting in faith, not just human effort, but God-centered prayerful dependence.

**5th. Think about what is lovely.** There is a Biblical kind of positive thinking. Look for things that are good and positive, and be thankful for them. Notice the majestic beauty of God's hand in creation and the subtle but significant signs of God's grace in people.

**6th. Think about what is commendable.** This coming at the end of the list is a great test for what are sometimes called the doubtful things in the Christian life. Things the Bible doesn't directly address but about which we need to make decisions. It's also a good counterweight to the pervasive focus of most of our media on things that are the opposite of commendable. To think about what is commendable is not a blind escapism but a courageous faith that sees the truth of things (that's how the list began, *think about whatever is true*) but sees the troubling things in light of the comforting truths revealed by God for his children.

**7th. Paul says, "*If there is any excellence if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things*".** He is saying I'm not giving you a complete list; I am giving you a different focus. He is

pointing us to God, to goodness, to true beauty and virtue, and saying this is what you think about; this is how you calculate life. The word excellence appears only in one other place in Scripture, and that's in the writings of the apostle Peter, who says that we are to declare the *excellencies* of him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light. Earlier, in **Philippians 3**, Paul said that he had counted everything else in his life as a loss compared to *the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus as Lord*. If you are a believer in Jesus, you have a wealth of things, truths that are excellent and praise-worthy. These truths renew your mind. You have been chosen to belong to God. He has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. He is awesomely majestic and righteous but so relentlessly merciful and gracious. You have in Him and in relationship with him so many excellent and praiseworthy things to think about and be thankful for. But do we let those things fill our hearts and minds and change us? We need to.

A pastor I know had a woman in his church come to him who was struggling terribly with a lot of bitterness and resentment toward a boss who had fired her. It was exhausting her and undermining her emotional and spiritual life. And she said, *"I know the Bible tells me I should forgive him and move on, but I can't seem to get over it. I'm just full of bitterness and anger and resentment."* So he gave her some helpful counsel, but he also told her about another woman in the church who had a very similar experience and seemed to be in a very different place. He suggested she talk to her and see if there was any insight to be gained.

So she did that. She went to this other woman, and they actually became close friends, and sometime later, she came back to the pastor and told him how well it had gone. She said, "From talking to her, I discovered what my real sin was." He said, "What do you mean?" She said, "Well, what I discovered is that we're two women that work very differently." He said, "What do you mean? How do you work?" She said, "Well, she's a woman who deeply believes that she's a child of God, who is loved and accepted and forgiven by the grace of God because of the love of Christ. I don't work like that. I work like a woman who feels that I've always got to prove myself and my career is going

to be how I do it, and I've got to earn the love of people, and I've got to earn the approval of people, and I have to earn acceptance, and I have to validate myself by succeeding in my career." *"What I came to understand is that there was a deeper issue."* She said, *"Up here, there's this sin of 'I can't forgive this person, and I ought to forgive him.' But underneath it, there's another sin, and that's where the roots are. The deeper sin," she said, "is I give lip service to Jesus as my Savior and the source of my life, but my real life, my real identity, my real happiness, was all wrapped up in my career and my success. So when that boss fired me, he went right to the root of the thing that was my identity and my happiness and life. So until I saw that I had made my job my god, and I repented of that, there was no freedom or power to forgive."*

Like this woman, it's hard sometimes, isn't it? But it is so crucial that we challenge ourselves, our perceptions our patterns of thinking. Sometimes what hinders us, what weakens us in the newness of our life, is that we're not getting the newness down deep on the *inside* where it transforms in our hearts and souls.

## CONCLUSION

The conclusion is summed up in **verse 9**, *What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.* What had they learned and received and heard and seen in him? It was that his life was all about Christ. Look back at what he said in **Philippians 3:9**... The Scripture teaches us that I can be... to use Paul's words, *found in him, (in Christ) not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith.* He is saying when you turn to Christ and place your faith in him as your Savior, you are found *in Christ!* You don't stand before God based on your thoughts and actions, and attitudes, your story or your record. If Jesus is your Lord, your Savior, that means not only that you have eternal life, but you have the presence of Christ and the promise of His care for you in this life.

Here's something that's true - a hard truth we need to face: our sins deserve God's judgment, they really do, and no amount of self-improvement or trying harder could ever make us right with God. But here is the good news. God did for us what we could not do for ourselves. He came into our world in Jesus, who lived a perfect life and then made a perfect sacrifice to pay the penalty for our sins. God raised him from the dead, demonstrating his victory as Lord and Savior.

God offers you new and eternal life through Christ. It is for everyone who admits their need, lays down their claims to earning or deserving, and comes to receive mercy and grace. You have, in Christ, a wealth of things that are excellent and praiseworthy to think about and calculate with as you face all of life.

**Philippians 4:9** says *practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you*. God, who is present everywhere, will be uniquely present with you as the God of peace *for you* as you put all of this good thinking into practice in real life

**Amen**



## **A Prayer for Receiving Christ**

Almighty God, Thank you for the truth that sets us free – for the good news of a Savior who died on the cross to pay for our sins and rose from the dead to offer new life. I acknowledge my sins. I have gone my own way breaking your laws of life. I turn now to you, placing my trust in Jesus, I receive and rest on him alone for my salvation. Thank you for the new and eternal life promised to all who come to Christ in faith.

## **A Prayer for Spiritual Renewal**

Create in me a clean heart O, Lord and renew a right spirit within me. Help me by your Holy Spirit to fill my mind with 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. Be with me God of Peace. In Jesus' name, Amen.