

Not Feeling Christmasy?

(12/15/24)

Please turn to *Philippians 4:6-13*

I've heard several people say they *aren't feeling too "Christmasy"* this year and the purpose of today's message is to show us all how to change that for the better!

I'm not judging anyone. People have different reasons for feeling blue around Christmas and my goal here is **1) it doesn't have to be that way** and **2) we can learn to turn a blue Christmas into a bright one!**

Let's start off today by reading God's Word:

[Phl 4:6-9 NKJV] 6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; 7 and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. 8 Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things [are] noble, whatever things [are] just, whatever things [are] pure, whatever things [are] lovely, whatever things [are] of good report, if [there is] any virtue and if [there is] anything praiseworthy--meditate on these things. 9 The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.

Before we break that down and talk about it, let me do something weird and borderline blasphemous...**let me switch around some of the words in here to negative things.** We need to know what got us to the state where we're not feeling "Christmassy." I'll have the Biblical verses on top and my modified version on the bottom of the screen. Here we go:

[ACTUAL BIBLE] 6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; 7 and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

[Modified]: "Be anxious about everything, avoid praying, be ungrateful, and complain to God; then stress that's not from God will expose and torment your hearts and minds."

[ACTUAL BIBLE] 8 Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things [are] noble, whatever things [are] just, whatever things [are] pure, whatever things [are] lovely, whatever things [are] of good report, if [there is] any virtue and if [there is] anything praiseworthy--meditate on these things.

[Modified]: “Finally brothers, whatever things are assumptions, whatever things make life look hopeless, whatever things are unfair, whatever things are racy gossip/rumor, whatever things are bad news, if there is any corruption/guilt and if there is anything to be resentful about—meditate on these things.”

Let's start with this **word in verse 8 that says “meditate.”**

First: to meditate on something is **not merely the domain of the New Age**. They may use that word and promote the practice of meditation more than the church, but the act of meditating on something isn't necessarily pagan. As a matter of fact, ***we meditate most every day without knowing it.***

The translation of the Greek word Paul used is ***“to think on, to attribute something to, to calculate, to suppose, to count/reckon.”***

Let's put this into practical application through some examples:

YOU'RE LOOKING IN THE MIRROR AT YOURSELF and you starting thinking about your hair, you start calculating your weight, you attribute specific things to yourself (whether good or bad), and you reckon your overall appearance.

- ***If your meditation is positive*** “I'm all that and a bag of chips” you'll walk away **feeling better.**
- ***If your meditation is negative:*** my hair looks horrible, I need to lose weight, my nose is too big, I'm not very attractive, etc. you'll walk away **feeling worse.**

YOU'RE PAYING BILLS and you start to count what you owe, you calculate what you have to spend, and you think about how this will affect you.

- ***If your meditation is positive*** “one way or another, God will help me make this work” you'll be at **peace.**
- ***If your meditation is negative*** “IDK what I'm going to do! We don't have the money to cover all this!” you'll be **anxious.**

I'm just going to say it: **the reason some of us aren't feeling too Christmassy is because we meditate on what's bad.**

Whether real or imagined. Present or future.

- *If our health is bad*, we meditate on it including all the results of bad health like pain, discomfort, lack of mobility, etc.
- *If our finances are bad*, we meditate on that and all its consequences like not paying bills, not being able to afford nice things, etc.
- *If our marriages are bad*, we meditate on that including the faults and sins of our spouse, our needs not being met, etc.

Have we spent too much of time thinking, counting, attributing, calculating, counting, and reckoning the bad in our lives? Which only results in stress, depression, anger, anxiousness, fear, loneliness, and resentment.

Negative thinking (meditation) alters our brain chemistry and therefore our emotions. Remember when we all had to isolate and stay home during Covid? After it was all over, the University of Cambridge did an experiment on negative vs positive thinking and they had two separate groups. The first were told to think about 20 negative things, present problems and future worries and fears. The second group of 20 were told to think on positive things, present and future hopes & dreams.

Here were the results of those who dwelt on bad things:

- Cognitive decline
- Memory loss
- Anxiety/Stress
- Reduces Immune System & response
- More easily triggered in bad ways
- Depression

Here were the results of those who thought about good things:

- Higher brain function
- Greater memory retention
- Higher levels of peace and joy
- Increased immune response
- Less triggered, even by past trauma.

Overall, those who dwelt on the bad had a mental health decline of 16% whereas those who meditated on good things had mental health increase of 10%.

The study then took the group who had been dwelling on the bad and told them to **suppress their bad thoughts.** All experienced a *“rebound” effect* where their mental health increased, fear and anxiety decreased, depression was less, and some even experienced JOY.

Please keep something in mind: **none of the actual external CONDITIONS of these folk had changed.** The people in the negative thinking group could pick and choose what to dwell on. I can only imagine some dwelt on bad health, low finances, a bad marriage, or what have you. Their health, finances, and marriages didn't change during the study—*but the way they felt did.*

May I ask you all something? **How dramatically do our lives change when we're feeling better?**

- Do we both act and react to people & things differently?
- Don't we have more patience aren't triggered as easily when bad things happen?

I say that to say this: **instead of waiting for things on the outside to get better so that we can feel more Christmassy, how about we change what we're thinking about instead?**

Both the Bible and science agrees that *what we think about affects how we feel more than anything else!* Now let's read today's verses one more time:

[Phl 4:6-9 NKJV] 6 **Be anxious for nothing**, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with **thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God**; 7 and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. 8 Finally, brethren, whatever things are **true**, whatever things [are] **noble**, whatever things [are] **just**, whatever things [are] **pure**, whatever things [are] **lovely**, whatever things [are] of **good report**, if [there is] any **virtue** and if [there is] anything **praiseworthy**--
meditate on these things.

What "things"? Whatever is:

- True
- Noble
- Just
- Pure
- Lovely
- Good report
- Virtuous
- Praiseworthy

UNCOMFORTABLE PAUSE

During that long uncomfortable pause were any of you thinking *“but I don’t have much good to meditate on! It’s mostly bad!”*

If you thought anything like that, THAT is why you’re not feeling “Christmassy.” People who spend lots of your time feeling sorry for themselves and meditating on bad things aren’t going to have “the Christmas spirit.” The result of this has been a decline in our mental health which means we’re depressed, anxious, worried, and lacking joy.

Did you know that during the **Covid lockdown** alcohol purchases rose to the highest in 50 years? Booze related deaths in 2020 increased by a whopping 25%. Why did this happen? Isolated in our homes, not able to go to church and see our family, people started meditating on the bad and the more they did, the more they drank.

You can make a choice right now. You can continue to do what you’ve been doing, complain about it, and remain a Grinch or a Scrooge.

Or we can decide TODAY to shift and redirect ourselves away from dwelling on the bad in our lives and start thinking about the good.

We can realize that it’s possible for us to start feeling better w/o a single thing in our external circumstances changing.

Here’s what the Apostle Paul said as he continued to encourage the Philippians to do the same:

[Phl 4:11-13 ESV] 11 Not that I am speaking of being in need, for **I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content.** 12 I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and **every circumstance**, I have learned ***the secret*** of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. 13 I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

“What’s ‘the secret’?!?!”

Paul already told them and us: **meditating on good things.**

If you made the right decision to **change your thinking today**, I’ll help you get started. Since we’re closing in on Christmas, there’s lots and lots to be thankful for.

Jesus was and is God.

- He created everything and has a plan to restore everyone who believes in Him.
- He has a plan to make humankind and creation great again.

In OT times **He would come down here once in a great while**—sometimes centuries would pass between the times He actually showed up. Even when He did touch down on earth, it was really brief then bada bing: He went back to Heaven.

2000 years ago He came down here and stayed for 32 years straight. In the end He died on the Cross, shed His blood to pay our debt, then rose from the dead 3 days later.

Because He did all of that, **you and I are forgiven.**

- The Holy Spirit came to live inside of us.
- Our future has been eternally secured. We have a spot in Heaven—His NJ.
- We are sealed/marked by the HS so that when the Resurrection finally happens, we'll be part of it.
- Our names are written in the Book of Life in Heaven. ***We get everything.***

If you truly need something good to think about, something positive to meditate on, something joyful to dwell on, start there.

- FORGIVENESS: we sinned a lot. Those sins were going to send us to a place of eternal torment called Hell. Jesus paid our debt and freed us from that prison! ***Look up verses about the blood of Jesus and forgiveness and meditate on those truths.***
- GOD OUR FATHER. After being Saved God became our dad. Best One we could ever have. ***Look up verses about being His kid***, what a great Guy He is, and realize how blessed you are for being in His family.
- ETERNAL LIFE. If your health is bad and your body is betraying you, dwell on the resurrection when there will be no more aging, sickness, disease, pain, or suffering! ***Read verses on the resurrection and meditate on them.***
- HEAVEN. We will all live in God's Holy City: Heaven. It's really bright and beautiful there and we'll be there forever. Even if you live to be 100 here, you'll live forever there. ***Think on Heaven!***

Yes, this will require effort. You and I will have to get our Bibles, do a little research, and read. Researching Bible subjects and verses is easier than ever. Go to the internet and type in “verses about the blood of Jesus” or “verses about God being my Father” and WHAM! They come up immediately. It's as easy as browsing social media, binge-watching Netflix, and playing video games.

As far as your personal life is concerned, there ARE good things in it.

The reason we're having such a hard time thinking of any is because we've spent too much time thinking about how bad it is. We've trained our brains and heart to do so.

Let's retrain ourselves by redirecting your thoughts to what's good, true, pure, and praiseworthy.

[Pro 23:7 KJV] 7 "For as he thinketh in his heart, so [is] he."

[2 Corinthians 10:5] "Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ."

Isaiah 26:3 – "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee."