

Big Idea: Focus on what you're called *to*, not what you're called *from*.

Primary Scripture: Philippians 4:8-9

Supporting Scripture: Philippians 3:13-14; Proverbs 4:23; Hebrews 12:1-2

CAPTURE (Why should students pay attention to and care about your message?)

- You're in the middle of class. It's third period and it's that class where the teacher talks in a monotone and the clock moves at half speed.
 - And out of nowhere... there it is.
 - A song. Just... stuck there. Playing on a loop in your head whether you want it to or not.
- You didn't sit down and decide to memorize it. You didn't study it. You probably didn't even like it that much. But you heard it enough times that it just moved in.
 - Now it lives rent free in your brain while you're trying to remember what year the Civil War started.
- Every generation has that one song.
 - Maybe for you it was *Baby Shark* on repeat until your parents wanted to lose their minds. And now it's whatever TikTok has decided is going to follow you around for the next three weeks.
- You don't *choose* for it to get stuck. It just *happens*.
 - Because what you hear on repeat eventually becomes part of you.
 - It's not just songs.
- Think about what you've been putting on repeat lately.
 - The shows you binge. The accounts you scroll through every single day. The conversations you keep replaying in your head when you're lying in bed at night trying to sleep but your brain has other plans.
- Some of us replay anxiety.
 - *What if this goes wrong? What if they don't like me? What if I fail?* And the longer you let that loop run, the bigger and louder it gets until it feels less like a thought and more like a fact.
- Some of us replay comparison.
 - *Why does everyone else's life look better than mine? Why do they have it figured out when I don't?* And every time you open

your phone and see someone else's highlight reel, the loop starts again.

- Some of us replay past mistakes.
 - *I can't believe I did that. I can't believe I said that. I've been carrying that one thing for so long I don't even know what it would feel like to put it down.*
- And we wonder why we feel stuck. Why we feel anxious. Why the same patterns keep showing up no matter how hard we try to move past them.
- **What you put on repeat shapes you.**
 - Your thoughts, your feed, your patterns... they're all forming you into something. The question is whether you've ever stopped to ask what.
- The Apostle Paul understood this. And in Philippians 4, he gives us one of the most direct and practical things in this entire letter.
 - He tells us exactly what deserves our mental energy and what doesn't.
- This is our fourth and final week of **Get Real**.
 - Over the last three weeks, we've watched Paul write from a prison cell about purpose, humility, and what it looks like to know Jesus above everything else.
 - And now in this final week, he lands the whole thing with something we need to hear.
- Following Jesus isn't just about what you're running *away from*. It's about what you're running *toward*. And those are very different things.

SCRIPTURE (What does God's Word say?)

- Paul is writing from a prison cell. Chains on his wrists. No idea when it's going to end.
- Every word of this letter is marked by joy, purpose, and forward momentum.
- Now he's getting to the end. His final thought. His last word before he closes.

⁸ *And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise.* ⁹ *Keep putting*

into practice all you learned and received from me—everything you heard from me and saw me doing. Then the God of peace will be with you. (Philippians 4:8-9 – NLT)

- He gives a list. *True. Honorable. Right. Pure. Lovely. Admirable. Excellent. Worthy of praise.*
 - It would be easy to read that and think Paul is just saying be positive.
 - But that's not what's happening here.
 - This is a filter. A specific set of categories for evaluating what actually deserves space in your head.
- *True* means it lines up with reality, not the distorted version your anxiety tells you.
- *Honorable* means it's worth your respect and attention.
- *Pure* means it's not going to drag you somewhere you don't want to go.
- *Lovely* means it's genuinely good, not just entertaining.
- When Paul says fix your thoughts on these things, he's saying be intentional about what you let move in and stay.
- And then verse 9 is the part that's really easy to miss.
 - Paul doesn't just say *think* about these things. He says *put it into practice*.
- The thought life leads somewhere. It shapes your decisions, your reactions, how you treat people, what you reach for when things get difficult.
- The promise attached to that is specific. The God of peace will be with you.
- Earlier in this same letter he describes what living this out looks like for him personally.

¹³ No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴ I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us. (Philippians 3:13-14 – NLT)

- Paul has made a deliberate decision about where his attention goes. Forward.

- Paul tells the Philippians to fix their minds on what is true and honorable and worthy of praise.
 - Then he shows them what this looks like.
 - He's forgotten what's behind. He's pressing toward what's ahead. Eyes forward. Feet moving.

INSIGHTS (What might this Scripture mean?)

1. Your focus shapes your future.

- If you spend every day consuming content that tells you your life isn't enough, that everyone else has it better, that you're always missing out... that message starts to feel true.
- When you consistently fill your mind with what is true, what is right, what is worth thinking about... it changes your perspective. It changes what feels normal. It changes what you reach for when things get difficult.

²³ Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life. (Proverbs 4:23 – NLT)

- What you dwell on becomes what you believe. What you believe shapes how you live.
- Your focus is quietly forming you every single day whether you're paying attention or not.

2. God calls you TO something, not just FROM something.

- A lot of people think following Jesus is mostly about stopping things.
 - *Stop lying. Stop being selfish. Stop chasing the wrong stuff.* And those things matter.
 - But if that's all you see, you're only getting half the picture.
- Look at Paul's list again. *True. Honorable. Right. Pure. Lovely. Admirable.*
 - That's not a list of things to avoid. That's a list of things to run toward.
- Paul isn't just saying stop filling your mind with the wrong things. He's saying here's what to fill it with instead.
- Following Jesus isn't primarily about what you're walking *away from*. It's about what you're walking *toward*.

^{1b} And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. ² We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith (Hebrews 12:1b-2a – NLT)

- What you move toward matters more than you think.
- For Paul, the prize isn't just a cleaner version of himself.
 - ***It's Jesus.*** It's the life God has called him into. Purpose that doesn't fade. Peace that doesn't depend on circumstances. A relationship that lasts no matter what.
- That's what you're being called toward too.
- The difference between someone who's just trying to be less bad and someone who's running toward Jesus... one is exhausting... the other is the whole point.

3. You can't run forward while looking backward.

- Backwards focus gets you stuck in a moment that's already over.
 - All that energy pours into something that can't change. And what God has for you ahead goes completely unnoticed.
- Paul is in prison when he writes this. If anyone had a reason to spiral, it was him.
- And he's saying no. One thing. Forget what's behind. Press toward what's ahead.
- What you've been through was real. And what God has for you next is worth *far more* of your attention than what's already behind you.
- Fix your thoughts on what is true and honorable and right. Press toward what God has called you to instead of replaying what's already gone. *The God of peace will be with you.* That's a guarantee. Full stop.
- That's Paul's one final thing. And it changes everything about how we move forward from here.

ACTION (How could we live this out?)

1. Fix your thoughts on something true.

- This week, pick one thing from Paul's list and be intentional about putting it in front of you.
- The point isn't the specific method. The point is the *intentionality*.

- You're making a deliberate decision to put something true and honorable and worthy in front of your mind before everything else competes for that space.
- When you do that consistently, something starts to shift. What you reach for changes. What feels normal changes.
- Paul isn't describing a one-time decision. He's describing a practice. And this week is where you start.

2. Pray for the peace Paul promises.

- When a loop starts, don't try to push through it on your own.
 - Stop. Name it out loud to God. Tell Him specifically what's running.
 - The anxiety about that situation.
 - The comparison that started when you opened your phone.
 - The mistake you can't stop replaying.
 - Whatever it is, bring it to Him by name.
 - Then ask Him for the peace He promises. The kind that comes from fixing your mind on what is true instead of what the loop is telling you.
- This isn't a technique. It's a conversation with God in the middle of something difficult.
- The more you do it the more you'll start to notice the difference between running the loop alone and bringing it to the One who promises peace.

3. Run toward something worthwhile... together.

- This week in your small group, talk about what you're running *toward*.
 - What's one specific thing you want to move toward in your relationship with Jesus over the next month?
- Whatever it is, name it out loud in your group, write it down, then ask the people in your group to check in with you on it.
- Paul's list in Philippians 4 is a **TO** list, not a **FROM** list. It's a direction.
- You'll run further toward it *with people* beside you than you ever will *alone*.