

**WHAT'S YOUR PROBLEM?
Filters, Friends, and Faith
Philippians 4:6-9**

A friend of mine told me a story one day that I will never forget about an encounter with an orangutan. Apparently, many years ago a carnival/fair came to his town that had (among many other bizarre things) a complacent looking orangutan sitting peacefully in a large iron cage. It almost looked catatonic because it was staring absently off into space as many people gawked at it in wonder. There was a sign over the cage that read: "Go 2 minutes with the orangutan in the cage and win \$200." It was a challenge to "wannabe" tough guys to go two minutes in the ring with this old, harmless looking primate. My friend's friend (We will call him Bob) had been heckling and harassing the beast from outside the bars, but it never moved. Also, Bob was a big old boy who stood well over six foot tall, so he was sure that this would be the easiest \$200 he had ever made! He began to doubt himself after he paid the entry fee when they handed him a helmet to put on his head. He stepped timidly into the cage and heard the door click shut behind him. The orangutan barely seemed to notice when he entered . . . until that door shut. Without warning, the beast came to life and took one bounding leap toward him. His long, hairy arms were extended to what seemed like 10 feet each, and his huge hand was open and drawn back behind him. As he descended from his leap, the great ape let fly with a mighty SLAP to the side of Bob's head. The helmet spun around on his head until Bob was looking out blearily through the ear hole. Screaming in fear, Bob began running in circles, pleading with the owners to LET HIM OUT! He did not last for 2 minutes. The orangutan quietly went back to his peaceful perch, content to wait for his next victim.

I love that story! It is one of the funniest accounts I have ever heard of someone getting far more than they bargained for from something that seemed harmless. That beast was ferocious, even though it looked old and weak. I told that story mostly because I thought that you needed to laugh this morning! But there is a point: **You have an orangutan in a cage. It is the two-pound lump of matter that is cradled inside the bony plates of your skull. That BEAST is your BRAIN! When your brain is trained and guarded by God's peace, it has the power to slap the snot out of worry when it tries to come inside.** The brain can be a powerful thing when it is overflowing with peace, but you must not think that the battle will be easy. *It is awesome when the battle goes our way, but what happens if worry wins? Is this possible? Of course! You see, this can actually happen if you do not CONTROL your cage doors. If you carelessly leave several cage doors open, you drive peace out and allow evil intruders to come in. Those intruders will not be kind.* Because of this, it is important to properly guard the entryways to your mind.

God promises to post a guard over your mind if you will cooperate with him by faithfully focusing on the things that honor his will for your life. Last Sunday, we learned this truth about how to find that proper focus. **Philippians 4:4-7 NIV**

4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! 5 Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. 6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

The first two weapons we learned about were JOYFUL PRAISE and SPECIFIC PRAYER. We learned from this passage that we must CHOOSE to USE these weapons that God has provided for us to combat worry and all of his evil friends (fear, unbelief, denial, etc.). These weapons have the power to CAST THOUGHTS OUT! If you did not hear the message last week, I urge you to get on our App or Website and check it out! Today, we want to learn the final two weapons that we can use to protect our minds from worry. All four of these weapons fight worry by training our brain to focus on the right things in the right way. **The first two weapons (praise and prayer) have the power to CAST worry out. Once that is done, this third weapon has the power to help KEEP worry out!**

Our third weapon against worry is the mental filter of meditation.

It is time for us to have our head examined by learning to examine our heads! Too often, we give too little thought to our thoughts. Enough! You and I must keep our minds clear of clutter. We must refuse to let unhealthy and ungodly thoughts litter our minds! Garbage in equals garbage out. Meditation is not the act of crossing your legs and humming nonsense to yourself. Instead, it is the spiritual discipline of controlling your thoughts! It is the act of taking EVERY THOUGHT CAPTIVE to the will of God. **2 Corinthians 10:3-5 NASB**

3 For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, 4 for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. 5 We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.

When God brings our SPIRIT to life, his Holy Spirit has total access to our inner man, and he pours truth and light into us fully and freely through all of our senses. But our senses, along with our bodily experiences, are still the primary fleshly entryways to our mind. The difference is now that our spirit is taking control of how these entryways are used. However, our FLESH likes to use these entryways in the manner that it has grown accustomed to over the years. **The fleshly mind likes to feed on unhealthy food and allow in unhealthy visitors. It does not like for the Spirit to control its doorways.** Those doorways become strongholds that allow the enemy secret access to our minds. The information that these entryways (spiritual and/or physical) feed our mind determine the feelings and the actions that follow. So, you must learn to properly regulate the things that have access to your mind. Some things simply DO NOT need to be allowed into our minds; and if they do get in,

they must be ushered out immediately. We must begin to meditate only on the things that honor God and our fellow man.

This is a DAILY physical and spiritual battle! Years ago I was taught that the biggest battlefield is our MIND. If the enemy can defeat us there, then he can defeat us everywhere else! The problem is that so many of us are absolutely LAZY in our mental disciplines. Simon Peter said it this way in his first letter:

1 Peter 1:13 NKJV

13 Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

That is such a great verse! I love how it begins. The NASB says that we need to “think clearly and prepare our minds for action!” Do you realize how hard it is for us to FOCUS OUR THOUGHTS and THINK DEEPLY about anything, especially when it comes to our faith and our spiritual life? When was the last time that you deeply meditated on some truth that you had learned from God? Sadly, I find that most people do not spend much time centering their thoughts on God’s truth. We let our minds just drift and wander all over the place, and we have no clue that we must choose (by the power of the HOLY SPIRIT) to CONTROL THE DIRECTION OF OUR THOUGHTS! In N.T. times, “girding up the loins of your mind” was a visual picture of gathering up the train of your robe so that you could run without being impeded. Some of you have a hard time not tripping over all of your random thoughts when you try to MEDITATE on God’s Word. Simon Peter says, “Get with it!” Quit letting everything and everyone else dictate the direction of your thoughts; YOU dictate the direction of your thoughts! Thinking is hard work, and we must be willing to do that work. As a pastor, I love it when God allows me to TEACH YOU HOW TO THINK . . . BIBLICALLY!! I believe that if you learn how to think biblically, then you will ultimately learn how to LIVE PROPERLY! Now in Philippians, Paul teaches us HOW we can practice the skill of healthy meditation. **Philippians 4:8 NASB**

8 Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.

Have you ever used this verse as a test (or filter) for determining what kind of thoughts you are thinking? I was taught to do this as a teenager, and it has served me very well in the moments that I have chosen to do it. **Use each word to measure the VALUE and NATURE of the thoughts that you are thinking.** For example, ask yourself first if the thoughts you are thinking are really TRUE. Don’t assume that they are. Too often, our worries are driven by thoughts that are emotionally driven rather than fact driven. How many of you have ever tried to diagnose some physical malady by going online before you hear the report back from the doctor. You may

start out thinking that you have a cold, but when you are done surfing the net, you will think you have diabetes, rheumatism, and cancer! Be careful. Don't let your mind FIXATE on all of the horrifying potential options. Check that thought at the door! If you don't KNOW that something is true, then don't DWELL on it. Instead, gravitate to things that you know are true. Work with the facts. You are alive. God is your healer and your sustainer. Let the thoughts that promote praise and prayer guide you. These weapons (meditation, praise, and prayer) work well together!

The interesting thing about this "thought list" is that they are meant to be taken together as well as individually. Some things may be true, but to dwell on them would not be honorable. This is a relational principle. It may be true that your boss is a JERK, but to dwell on that truth would not be honorable, right(eous), or lovely. Maybe it would be better to dwell on the truth that your boss needs to experience the love of Christ. That would drive you to pray for him rather than poison yourself and others about him! My challenge for you this week is to look up each of the filter words that Paul gives to us in this passage and really think about how you can apply them to every thought that you are tempted to dwell on. You will be surprised at what they will WEED OUT!

Now, I want us to look at the FINAL WEAPON that Paul gives to us in this passage. It is actually very different from the other three, but I think that it is still a crucial part of helping us to keep a proper focus.

Our fourth weapon against worry is Christ-centered friendships and mentors.

This weapon is found throughout the whole letter. From the very first, he writes about the rich value of a healthy community of friendship (Koinonia). He constantly refers to how much those Christian relationships have blessed and impacted his life and the life of the Philippian believers. In at least two places, he actually highlights the importance of Christ-centered friendships and mentors in order to press the issue in our lives! **Philippians 3:17 NLT**

17 Dear brothers and sisters, pattern your lives after mine, and learn from those who follow our example.

He says this even more forcefully in the passage that we are focused on today.
Philippians 4:9 NASB

9 The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

Let me ask you two DIRECT questions. Do you have any close friendships with godly people that you allow to speak into your life? Do you have any spiritual mentors that you consult when you need wisdom for some key issue you are facing? I cannot tell you how often I ask these questions. Sadly, the answer most often is a simple "NO."

That is a TRAGEDY! It is hard for me to imagine how different my life would be without the godly friendships and mentors that I have had from the time I was a teenager all the way up to today. You don't know what you are missing, and you certainly don't know what you are allowing into your life by the ABSENCE of these precious people. I love to illustrate this principle using a perplexing verse from Proverbs. **Proverbs 16:25 NASB**

25 There is a way which seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death.

At face value, this is a terrifying verse. It implies that you can think that something is actually the right way to go, but that thing will wind up killing you! What? That makes me want to hide in a closet! But the key to understanding the counsel of the verse is found right in the middle of the verse. Look at the words again, and I will highlight the answer. **"There is a way which seems right to A MAN. . ."** Now ladies, this is not a knock of the male gender! It applies to men and women. It means that one person ALONE will often choose a path that could lead him or her to death. **You see, you were never MEANT to live your Christian life in isolation. You need the wisdom and strength that come from healthy, Christ-centered friendships and mentors.** You need people that you can emulate and people that you can bounce ideas off of when you are facing decisions or dilemmas. Life comes at you fast, and you need help processing it wisely. Are you doing this?

First, do you have any Christ-centered friendships? These are people that you love being around and having fun with. They are not just people that you go to when you want to "talk spiritual." But while you are loving and living life with these people, you are also mutually encouraging one another in your faith. This is healthy biblical community. **It is why we try to make connecting points by pushing people toward LIFE GROUPS.** Ours are going to start in the next two weeks, so you should take advantage of this if you do not have any (or many) healthy Christian friendships! **This will bless you during good seasons and save you during hard seasons.**

I love to read anything that Philip Yancey writes. In one of his books, he lists the MENTORS that have impacted his life. Some of them are people that he knew personally and loved. Others are actually authors whose writings had a massive influence over him. He has actually been a mentor to me! Mentors come in all shapes and sizes. **Our purpose is not to DRAIN them in order to fill ourselves, but to LEARN from them as we watch their walk and hear their wisdom.** Who are your mentors? Whose walk are you using as a PATTERN for living? Paul made it clear in another place that he only wanted people to **"follow him AS he follows Christ!"** You don't want to follow people without boundaries or qualifications. You follow a mentor only so far as he follows Christ. This will be a powerful weapon against any mental intruders that try to invade your life.

My friends, it is time to put all of these weapons into place and into play in your lives. It is one thing to learn about them and see them being used in the lives of

others, but you must choose to PRACTICE them in your own life. Practice. Practice. Practice! Paul was so right. When you do this, then you wind up with more than just the peace of God in your life. You have the promise that the GOD OF PEACE will be with you. **This is like having KING KONG in your cage! It is one thing to have the peace of God guarding your soul, but it is another thing for the God of Peace to be present as the Guardian of your soul.** Paul makes this distinction because our decision to let God control even our very thoughts brings him nearer than he can be experienced in any other way! When this happens, worry doesn't stand a chance.

Let's pray.