

Shalom AZ Ministries

In Pursuit of Israel's Redemption



"Set Your Mind on Things Above"

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Devotion and Discussion Questions

Key Texts (TLV): Phil. 4:8-9; 3:18-21; Phil. 1:29-30; Col. 3:2; 2 Cor. 4:8-9

Have you ever noticed how quickly your mind can find something wrong? You can have ten things going well and one thing going badly, and somehow that one thing can take over your thoughts. One conversation did not go the way you hoped. One bill showed up unexpectedly. One person disappointed you. One plan fell apart. Before long, you are replaying it, turning it over, imagining what might happen next, and rehearsing everything that is wrong. If we want to find something to complain about, we can. I promise. Every situation in life has things that are difficult, disappointing, and painful. The question is not whether those things are real. The question is: **What are we going to set our minds on?**

That is where Paul brings us in Phil. 4:8-9. Remember, Paul is not writing these words from a comfortable place. He is imprisoned. He has rivals. He does not know whether he is going to live or die. And he is writing to people who are facing real pressure of their own. Yet Paul has already told them, *"Rejoice in the Lord always—again I will say, rejoice!"* and, *"Do not be anxious about anything."* Now he comes to one final exhortation: *"Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable—if there is any virtue and if there is anything worthy of praise—dwell on these things"* (Phil. 4:8). Paul is teaching us that we cannot always control what happens around us, but we do have a responsibility for where we allow our minds to dwell.

1. DWELL ON WHAT IS TRUE, HONORABLE, JUST, PURE, LOVELY, AND COMMENDABLE

Paul begins, *"Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable..."* (Phil. 4:8). The word translated "whatever" carries the sense of "as much as" or "to the extent that." In other words, to the extent that something is true, give consideration to it. To the extent that it is honorable, righteous, pure, loving, and commendable, take that into account. And the key word comes at the end: *"dwell on these things."* The word has the idea of reckoning, considering, or taking something into account. Paul is not simply telling us to "think happy thoughts." He is telling us to deliberately consider what is true and good and worthy of praise.

Our minds naturally tend to do the opposite. In conflict, we can assume the worst motives. When someone says something that hurts us, we may immediately decide what they meant by it. When circumstances become difficult, our thoughts can become filled with everything that cannot happen, everything that will not work, and everything that is going wrong. Paul says, "Don't let your mind live there." Start with what is true. Look for what is honorable. Ask what is righteous. Look for what moves you toward loving people rather than away from them. This is not denying reality. It is refusing to allow the darkest interpretation of reality to become the only thing we see.

2. LET YOUR THOUGHTS ULTIMATELY LEAD YOU TO MESSIAH

When we step back and look at Paul's list as a whole, something beautiful happens. Everything Paul names can ultimately be spoken of Yeshua. He is true. He is honorable. He is righteous. He

is pure. He is lovely—always moving toward others in love. He is commendable. He is of perfect and excellent character. He alone is completely worthy of praise. So when Paul says to dwell on these things, ultimately he is directing our attention back toward Messiah. This is consistent with what he writes elsewhere: *“Focus your mind on things above, not on things on the earth”* (Col. 3:2). Earlier in Philippians, Paul describes the enemies of the cross as those who *“set their minds on earthly things”* (Phil. 3:19). The believer is called to another way of seeing.

That is exactly how Paul is living. He could look at prison and complain, but instead he sees that Messiah is being proclaimed. He could look at his rivals and become bitter, but instead he rejoices because Messiah is being proclaimed. He could look at the uncertainty of life and death and be consumed with fear, but instead he says that if he lives, he lives for Messiah, and if he dies, he will be with Messiah. Paul sees his life through the prism of Messiah. That is why this is not optimism versus pessimism. It is something deeper. In the middle of grief we may still say, “I do not understand what God is doing. I cannot see how this could possibly work together for good. But I know that I am His, He is mine, I am in His hands, and He is good.” The Lord is near. So look over. Fix your eyes on Him. Let your thoughts dwell on the One who is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, virtuous, and worthy of praise.

3. PUT THESE THINGS INTO PRACTICE

Paul does not stop with our thoughts. Verse 9 says, *“What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—put these things into practice, and the God of shalom will be with you”* (Phil. 4:9). The language of “learned” carries the idea of a disciple, a pupil, someone who is learning from a teacher. Paul tells them that they have not only heard these things from him; they have seen them lived out in him. Earlier he reminded them that they were *“experiencing the same struggle you saw in me and now you are hearing in me”* (Phil. 1:30). Paul is essentially saying, “You have watched me walk through suffering. You have heard what I taught you. You have seen how I responded. Now put these things into practice.”

Paul is an apprentice to the Master, Yeshua, and he is inviting them to follow him as he follows Yeshua. Afraid? Look to Yeshua. What was His disposition? Frustrated, hurt, or mistreated by people? Look to Him. He did not retaliate. Anxious and overwhelmed? Look to Him. He prayed. He entrusted Himself to the Father. And when circumstances seem to consume every thought, look again to Him. Stop becoming a prisoner of the moment. Stop allowing all the “can’ts,” “won’ts,” and “this isn’t working” thoughts to dominate your mind. Set your thoughts on what you know to be true: He is sovereign. He is Lord. He is near. He will never leave you or forsake you. Then do what you have learned. This way of thinking is not merely something we admire; it is something we practice moment by moment and day by day.

CONCLUSION

Paul could tell the Philippians to live this way because he was living it himself. He was *“hard pressed in every way, yet not crushed; perplexed, yet not in despair; persecuted, yet not forsaken; struck down, yet not destroyed”* (2 Cor. 4:8–9). His circumstances were real. His pain was real. His uncertainty was real. But they did not have the final word over his mind. Messiah did. Paul kept looking over to the Master. He kept setting his mind on Him. And because Messiah was everything to Paul, Paul could see everything else in light of Messiah. That is the call for us too: not to pretend that everything is good, but to refuse to let what is difficult become bigger in our minds than the One who is good.

So what has your mind been dwelling on? Maybe today you have been rehearsing the hurt. Replaying the conversation. Imagining the worst. Focusing on everything that is not working. Perhaps your circumstances have become so large in your thoughts that you have almost lost sight of the Lord who is near. Then this is the moment to bring your mind back to Him. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you where your thoughts have become captive to fear, bitterness, anger, disappointment, or anxiety. Give those thoughts to the Lord, and deliberately turn your attention toward Yeshua. He is true. He is honorable. He is righteous. He is pure. He is lovely. He is worthy of praise. Look to Him. Think on Him. Follow Him. And then, as Paul says, put these things into practice. **Set your mind on things above.**

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In Phil. 4:8, Paul tells us to dwell on what is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, virtuous, and worthy of praise. Why do you think Paul places so much emphasis on what occupies our thoughts?
2. How does Paul's own response to imprisonment, opposition, and uncertainty demonstrate the kind of mindset he is asking the Philippians to have?
3. Which of the qualities listed in Phil. 4:8 most clearly points you toward the character of Yeshua? Why?
4. What situation in your life right now tends to pull your thoughts toward fear, frustration, bitterness, or complaining? What is true about God and His character in the middle of that situation?
5. Think about a recent conflict or misunderstanding. Did you assume the worst about the other person, or did you give them the benefit of the doubt? How might Phil. 4:8 change the way you think about that situation?

CLOSING PRAYER

Abba, help us to set our minds on You. When our thoughts become consumed by what is wrong, what might happen, what someone has done, or what we cannot control, remind us that You are near. Teach us to dwell on what is true, honorable, righteous, pure, lovely, commendable, virtuous, and worthy of praise.

Yeshua, we want to look to You and become like You—not only in what we do, but in the way we do it. Ruach ha-Kodesh, guard our thoughts and redirect our minds when fear, anxiety, bitterness, or frustration begins to take hold. Help us not only to hear Your Word, but to put these things into practice, moment by moment and day by day. May our thoughts, our attitudes, and our lives increasingly reflect Messiah.

B'Shem Yeshua, In the name of Yeshua, amen.