

Jesse Wallace
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Philippians 4:8-9

Title: Christian Thinking

Good morning, my name is Jesse. It's such an honor to have the opportunity to share from God's word. This morning we are going to be in Philippians chapter 4 and looking at verses 8 and 9.

The title of my message this morning is called "**Christian Thinking**" and I worked hard on that title by the way.

But that's what we're looking at this morning. We're looking at how the apostle Paul instructs the Philippian Christians about the virtues of Christian thinking.

And this morning we'll see what ought to be occupying our minds and as a result the God of peace will be with us. There's your summary.

INTRODUCTION

Did you know that on a daily basis our minds think thousands of thoughts. You know the more I researched this the more numbers came up. Some articles state about 6,000 thoughts a day, others would say up to 60,000 thoughts in a day. That is quit the delta.

I was talking to my wife last night about this data and she suggested maybe the 6,000 is the number of thoughts men think and 60,000 is what women think.

Now, I suppose depending on what you're going through in any given 24-hour period of time, the number can certainly fluctuate. But I'm just going to settle on the idea that our minds process thousands of thoughts within a day, even when you sleep.

What I also found out when researching our thoughts, and I saw that there was more of a consensus on this and that is that they say about 80% of our thoughts are negative thoughts.

Again, not sure how they quantify that. Obviously, that could differ for any individual, could be 90% or 100% negative. I work with people like that.

Or could be 50% or 30%. But I think there's some truth to those stats.

Of course, this research must have been conducted on the unredeemed right? Surely if we're born again, we're not prone to that.

Well, let me say, I wouldn't disagree that within a 24-hour period of time, there's probably a thousand or thousands of thoughts that run through our minds.

I also wouldn't disagree that a large percentage of those thoughts that run through our minds could be categorized as negative.

Scripture gives us some big categories of what negative thoughts would fall into, like lust, anger, greed, bitterness, envy, jealousy. Then of course there's thoughts like blame, regrets and fear that we process. Let's personalize this a little.

Here are some other examples of negative thoughts. And these might be thoughts we actually dwell on:

- I can't change, this is just who I am
- I can never get out of debt.
- No one really loves me
- I'm not good at relationships
- I'll never lose weight
- I'm as close to God as I'll ever get
- I can't do this anymore
- I'm not enough
- I'm a burden
- I'm a failure
- I'm not going to be able to get through this
- This person makes me so mad

And the list goes on. Negative thoughts, often times they plague our minds.

Well, even though we're redeemed, the apostle Paul knows we still live in these bodies that are fallen.

He knows we're still susceptible to sin and we're susceptible to deception and he knows we need to be intentional in the area of the mind if we're going to grow in Christ. We really have to be intentional with everything if we really want to progress spiritually.

So, this morning I want us to look at what God says about this topic of Christian thinking. How should we think? What should we set our minds on?

BECAUSE, OUR THOUGHT LIFE MATTERS TO GOD.

I really just want to look at the what, the why and the how this morning from this passage.

WHAT - Thought

Quickly on the background to give some context, Paul is writing this letter to the Philippian church from a Roman prison. You say, "how do we know that?" Well, he mentions he's in chains, makes mention of the palace guard, mentions the household of Caesar. That's how we know.

- He's giving them an update on his situation,
- he's thanking them for a gift they had delivered to him in prison and
- then in the last chapter here in chapter 4, Paul gives these kinds of loosely connected instructions to the church at Philippi.

Which he often has a section like this that follows the first half of his letters. First, he talks about who we are in Christ, how good the Lord is and then follows the instruction on how to conduct themselves and in this case instruction on what to think. So, let's get into this.

And just one more thought in relation to the context here is, earlier in the letter he tells them "For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to **suffer** for His sake" – Phil. 1:29.

And I thought it was interesting to note that this word for suffer can mean persecution but also in scripture it's used to refer to physical suffering/ailments, or hardships in a general sense.

And so that kind of gives me good context and reminds us that the Lord allows suffering in our lives for certain purposes and I think before going further, I just want to say that that this passage isn't just how we should think if things are going well but also when we're in a difficult season of life as well.

What should we fill our minds with even when we're suffering, even when things are going my way, even when I'm in pain. I just wanted to emphasize that little bit of important context before we jump in. Or maybe you're going through a season like that.

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**.

Let's start by looking at the end of verse 8. Notice there where he says, "Meditate on these things".

You might have a translation that uses the words "think on these things" and that's the idea: to think, to reason, to reckon, to meditate on these things.

I like the word meditate because it has that idea of chewing on it, then swallowing it, then bringing it back up to chew on it some more and you do it over and over to really get the nutrients out of it. Just really pondering over something.

Cows do that right; they chew the cud. I'm not saying you're cows. Because you're not, you're sheep. But I'm saying we already think like that about certain thoughts that we keep bringing up in our minds.

Paul is saying what kinds of thoughts we ought to keep bringing back and thinking on.

And the fact that Paul tells us to “meditate on these things” on these good things, implies that **we can and we should exercise control over this part of our lives** (mind) because honestly, I think many of us never think of controlling our minds that much. I think many of us may not think it’s possible to do that.

Now in terms of discipleship. We’re pressing in, walking with Jesus, growing in our knowledge and devotion to Him. We know Christianity is not only a Sunday activity, right? We know our relationship with the Lord is 7 days a week and not 1 day a week.

We know that. He wants our walk with Him to carry over into all of the big buckets of our life: work, parenting, in our marriages, when we’re alone.

We are going through an FPU course here at our church because that is just another area (another bucket) where we want to look at what scripture says (and it says a lot) about how to spend and manage money and that’s another area that we want to bring under the obedience of Christ in our lives. And that’s why we do it.

It’s not to overlay you with rules and constraints. It’s the opposite. The result is of living for Jesus is actually freedom and peace. God is giving us instruction with how to live well in this life.

But again, the point is this area the mind is another area (another bucket) in the Christian life that we want to bring the Lord into. In 2 Corinthians 10:5 “bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ”

Jesus said, “you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your **MIND**, and with all your strength.”

I want to shatter the illusion that we have to be victims of our thoughts. We don’t have to entertain the negative thoughts that try to come back up. We want to chew and meditate on good things. And when bad things come up, don’t chew on it and meditate on it, spit that out (to keep the cow analogy)!

But we also can’t sit back and be passive in this area. I don’t know any area that you can just be passive if you want to grow in the Lord. If I’m just being passive then I’m going to drift right into the flesh. It takes a spiritual

sweat to grow. That's one of the benefits of being here, is we can grow in the Lord together.

At first exercising control in this area of the mind seems difficult or even exhausting. Certainly, you can feel discouraged because of the barrage of hideous thoughts that can run through your mind in any given day.

I know I've felt like that before and I'm sure we all have. There are thoughts that stick with you or would come up so often for so long, they just pop up in your mind and you are so used to them. They're like a **squatter** that you can't evict. They just linger.

Then you begin to believe this is just who I am. I'll never change. I've made all this progress in my walk with God, being sanctified, serving Him, loving others, but my mind constantly drifts. Is victory in this area even possible?

Yes. I'm not saying we will have a mind that never thinks a bad thought but I'm saying we can make progress toward winning the battle in our minds. But it does take some intentionality. Again, we can't be passive. That's discipleship 101. We need to exercise self-control.

“A person without self-control is like a city with broken-down walls.” – Proverbs 25:28 (NLT)

That means anyone can go in and anyone can go out. And the same thing for us, our minds if we don't put up proper controls, gate, guard, we will be left exposed and vulnerable to an intrusion of evil thoughts and temptations come in and we don't want that.

We need to be careful what we let into our minds.

But there are some thoughts we can let in and should welcome. Thoughts that we should meditate on.

Let's look at these 6 things we should think on. I'm not going to go into much detail with all these because. I don't believe this list is intended to be an exhaustive list but rather I believe it's more so representative. I don't want us to get lost in the details this morning. I think that's why he says the repeated phrase, **“whatever things”**. It's more so representative. I want

us to heed the call of this verse, not to over analyze the particulars of it and get lost in the weeds. So, let's look at some of these.

“Whatever things are true” meaning not false or unreliable. But genuine and real. Whatever is true...meditate on these things. Jesus said, when praying for His disciples in the garden of Gethsemane, He said, “sanctify them by Your Word, Your Word is truth”.

Psalms 119:160 says, “The entirety of Your word is truth”. And certainly, in scripture we're commanded to meditate on the word of God. Reading and studying scripture is something I do often but let's be honest, meditating, is more difficult. The idea of meditating, chewing on and swallowing and then bringing backup to chew on is difficult in our fast past world with so many distractions.

Romans 12:2 “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”

You want to renew your mind? Then read and meditate on the truth of God's word.

“Whatever things are noble”

'Whatever things are honest,' 'Whatever things are reverent,' I love what Alexander Maclaren said about this verse,

“let grave, serious, solemn thought be familiar to your minds, not frivolities, not mean things. There is an old story in Roman history about the barbarians breaking into the Capitol, and their fury being awed into silence, and struck into immobility, as they saw, round and round in the hall, the august Senators, each in his seat. Let your minds be like that, with reverent thoughts clustering on every side; and when wild passions, and animal desires, and low, mean contemplations dare to cross the threshold, they will be awed into silence and stillness.”

'Whatever things are noble... think on these things.'

That is wonderful imagery isn't it. You can imagine these barbarians breaking into the capital of Rome, and as they run in yelling, you can just

see their faces as they slow down, and they're in awe by the detailed marble statues of the senators in their chamber.

Yes, may our thoughts be like that, that when invasive thoughts rush in they are mesmerized and realize they don't belong here.

Sorry, this isn't a place for entertaining those kinds of thoughts. They need to go. Stop them in their tracks! Get them out. Don't give into them.

Some of these are other characteristics of Christian thinking don't require a lot of elaboration but let's run through them quickly.

“Whatever things are just”

“Whatever things are pure”

“Whatever things are lovely”

“Whatever things are of good report”

“If there is any virtue (benefit)”

“If there is anything praiseworthy”

Meditate on these things.

The phrase “meditate on these things” in the Greek grammar, this is what they call the present imperative. Which means, these are commands that are not expected to be followed only once but as an ongoing process.

For example, if your Dr. says, “Eat less fatty foods”. In that example advice, the Dr. is issuing an order which should always be followed.

It's not something temporary, it's something we need to keep doing. Or he's going to put you on a statin.

Paul speaks in the same present imperative. He's advising us that we should be constantly examining what we expose our minds to.

And Paul gives a good list of principles that work well as a filter for us to know what we ought to be thinking about. **What filter do you currently use now?**

Now look, as Christians, let me just say, we have so much liberty. So much freedom in Christ. I wrestled with how to further apply this, without coming off as a complete legalist. I'm not trying to apply this in the sense that you need to cancel your Paramount+ subscription, or delete your Amazon Prime subscription. Ok, maybe your Disney+. I'm kidding.

The apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians. 10:23 "All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify."

In other words, just because something is permitted doesn't mean it's beneficial. Yes you can watch TV, yes, you can listen to music, yes you can read books, yes you can connect on Social Media.

But if we are going to make progress in our thinking, in the area of our minds, we do need to use discernment on what we're letting into our minds. Again, all things are lawful, but not all things are beneficial.

I was reading a message by H.B. Charles and he mentioned this in his message on this passage:

"A certain mother was peeling vegetables for a salad when her daughter, home from college, casually mentioned that she was going to a questionable movie that evening. The mother suddenly picked up a handful of garbage and threw it in the salad. "Mother!" screamed the shocked girl. "You're putting garbage in the salad." "I know," replied the mother, "but I thought that if you don't mind putting garbage in your mind, you certainly wouldn't mind a little in your stomach too!"

Again, not trying to take away your TV but we need to be careful what we let into our minds to live there. I think most of us know our limits on what we allow ourselves to watch and listen to.

I would say the question is more so HOW MUCH are we allowing in. In the sense of the world's programming into our minds.

Let's read this Paul's list here from the negative perspective. The negative would be whatever things are false, whatever things are dishonorable, whatever things are unjust, whatever things are impure, whatever things are hideous, whatever things are reprehensible...do not meditate on these things. Do not let into your mind things like this.

Often times if we're not alert, that's where our minds can be pulled. I don't know about you, but I'm tired of getting beat up here. I want to experience victory. I want to experience transformation and I want to stop believing the lie, that this is just who I am or it's just not controllable. That's not what God's Word is telling me.

I know it's not just TV or music. It's thoughts of lust, discouragement, depression, anger, confusion, you name it, the child of God is also susceptible to it. Not to mention how the devil wants to exploit those areas or weaknesses in our lives.

This is something Charles Spurgeon wrestled with are those invasive thoughts. He said:

"Friend, I know what you mean, for I have myself been hunted by this wolf. A man might as well hope to fight a swarm of flies with a sword as to master his own thoughts when they are set on by the devil"

He goes on to say:

"The rush and throng of these dreadful thoughts, put you in much the same condition as the poor diseased woman who could not come to Jesus for the press of the crowd around her. Still, she put forth her finger, and touched the fringe of the Lord's garment, and she was healed. You can do the same."

The woman who was bleeding for 12 years, trying to make her way through the crowd, only to touch the hem of his garment and she was healed. When you're overwhelmed with thoughts that aren't yours may we also just cry out to Jesus for deliverance.

WHY - Action

Why is the apostle Paul giving us this counsel?

I think one of the reasons is because our thought life molds action.

Because good thinking leads to good doing.

Proverbs 23:7 "For as he thinks in his heart, so *is* he."

I'll take myself as an example. At one point in my life, I desired to be married, buy a home, have children (not all at the same time). But all these big things are the outputs of much thought.

These are, thoughts made visible. Same with this church building that we're in, much thought went into the design and planning of its development.

And sooner or later what starts off as thoughts and desires (good or bad) works itself out into something solid and visible.

Craig Groeschel always says on his leadership podcast "your life is always moving in the direction of your strongest thoughts".

And that's why it's so important that we meditate on the right things. We want beautiful things coming out of our lives. But if we're constantly meditating on what's false or impure or things that discourage us, we're always going to be held back. We're never going to step into what God has in store for us.

Sometimes our thoughts can paralyze us from serving the Lord or stepping out or just experiencing the Lord and all the good things He has for us.

We need to continue to believe the truth and reject the lies.

HOW - Action

How might we obey this counsel?

⁹ The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, **THESE DO (practice)**, and the **God of peace will be with you (result)**.

In verse 8, he's talking about how we ought to think. Now in verse 9, Paul is using himself as the example as he often does.

He says the things you learned, received, heard and saw in me, "these do", in other words practice these things. So, we go from **thought (8)** to **action (9)** to **result (9)**.

Verse 8 commands us to think right, verse 9 commands us to do right.

So how do we do this. How do we practice this. Well one way is we fill our minds with Christ.

Some say regarding verse 8, that it is the shortest biography of Christ. Because Jesus is true, noble, just, pure, lovely, He's certainly praiseworthy. These things are all embodied in the person of Jesus Christ.

When those invasive thoughts enter in, we need to reject them, but we also need to meditate on Christ. Jesus is the One who should occupy our minds the most. And if He is, then all good things are there.

You know when you're really hungry some of the most non-appetizing things look attractive and appetizing. I mean, I heard sometimes people will eat - some Cheetos, ritz crackers with cheese wiz, and a pop tart...with syrup on top. Just not healthy and not appetizing especially when you eat them together but you're doing it because you're hungry.

Same idea goes when you're full some of the most attractive things do not look appetizing. I remember when I got up one Saturday, ate oatmeal for breakfast and went to Panera to get a coffee. As soon as I walked in the door, there was a lady there handing out samples of cinnamon rolls. I could see it was freshly baked, coated with icing, You could just see the buttery layers and sweet cinnamon. Hhhmm.

BUT, since I had already eaten and was full. I was satisfied, I had no desire to eat that believe it or not. So I declined. And then she say's but it's free as if she was surprised to see me turn it down. I'm like, don't tempt me.

Same thing with the Lord, if you're filling yourself with Jesus, meditating on Jesus a lot of those things of the world that are not healthy for us are not gonna look as attractive.

You're not going to have a hunger for it, you're not going to want to entertain critical thoughts because Jesus is there and His desires become your desires.

So, what is your filter? What mindset are you going to choose? What are you going to meditate on? What are you going to chew on and swallow and bring back up and chew on some more.

What is one negative thought that's not healthy that has no benefit that you need to stop chewing on, that you keep bringing back up to meditate on?

I'm not trying to tell you to do better, try harder this morning. I simply just want to encourage you meditate on Christ our Lord, our Savior, our King. Contemplate Christ. Let your mind be His sanctuary. That's where the power is. You can walk and talk with Him, cry out to Him, He will lead you and guide you. Thank you, Jesus.

One more thing about this verse here. We looked at verse 8 thought, verse 9 action, and the last part of verse 9, the result.

God of peace will be with you.

what we think about determines our experience with the God of peace

A lot of commentators would say it if you do these things THEN the God of peace will be with you but I would also like to suggest that as you do these things the God of peace Himself will help you. Without Him we can do nothing.

Think rightly, rejoice in the Lord continually, think on things that are true, pure and lovely and the God of peace Himself will be with you.

Sermon Application and Discussion Questions
Phil. 4:8-9
Christian Thinking

Summary: The apostle Paul instructs the Philippian Christians about the virtues of Christian thinking. He teaches them as an example how they ought to be occupying their minds and as a result the God of peace will be with them.

1. How do you make determinations before watching a movie/show or listening to a podcast or music? What filter do you use to determine if this is something good or bad/edifying or not beneficial?

2. What are some of the things that fill our minds on a daily basis? Things that we meditate on? Is it concerns about children, work, world news, United States, frustration about a situation you're in, thinking about things we want, etc.?

3. If what we think/meditate on often determines the direction of our life and our life's outputs (good or bad), how can we fill our minds with things that are true, pure, just, etc.? How can we expel ungodly thoughts?

4. OT is leading up to this event when the Messiah is born, lives, dies, is buried and rises from the dead. We here in the NT are looking back at that event. And we also look back at our salvation experience. We also think of the future as we'll be in heaven and we look forward to when we'll see Jesus' face to face. The bible says, "all things were created by him, and for him", He is the "alpha and omega, the beginning and the end", "To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood,". Is Jesus in our thoughts? Do we meditate on Him, His goodness? Do we worship Him with our minds?

5. Do you ever think about the idea that we can control the area of the mind? Is this a discipline we exercise in our Christian walk?