

“The Epistle of Joy (Part 13 – Philippians 4:8-9)”

Each person has about 10,000 thoughts per day – what kind of things do you think about? Are your thoughts positive and godly, or negative and crummy? Do you whine about the unpleasant things in your life, or do you focus on the many positive blessings that are already right underneath your nose? Since we usually find what we’re looking for, the question is, “What are you focusing on – the positives in your life, or the negatives?” The Apostle Paul writes in Philippians 4:8-9, *“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.”*

Let’s focus on the positives in life, and focus on the positives in other people, and in ourselves – rather than on the negatives!

The seven qualities that Paul mentions in Philippians 4:8 should serve as sifters to filter each one of the 10,000 thoughts that we have per day. If a thought can’t pass through one of these gates than it needs to be rejected and not allowed to enter our minds. So, we should not allow any thought into our minds unless it can pass through one of these filters: 1) is it true (real, authentic); 2) is it noble (honorable, upright, above board); 3) is it right (just, even-handed); 4) is it pure (wholesome, faithful, unspotted); 5) is it lovely (beautiful, delightful); 6) is it of good report (admirable, fit to hear, worth talking about); and 7) is it virtuous (excellent, praiseworthy, does it celebrate a person’s strengths)? We need to block the thought, though, and reject it, and not allow it into our minds if: 1) it is false (inaccurate, deceitful); 2) it is corrupt (dishonest, shady, crooked); 3) it is unfair (wrong); 4) it is dirty (filthy, out of bounds); 5) it is horrible (disgusting, inappropriate); 6) it is a bad report (or brings us down, or goes against what God has said); 7) it is scandalous (a rumor or hearsay, if it focuses on a person’s faults or shortcomings).

Saint Jerome said that he struggled with the thoughts that were in his mind. He said the one thing that really helped his thought life was translating the Hebrew Bible into Latin. Since his solution probably is not really going to help any of us, we need to find something else that is positive and constructive to focus on when we are bombarded by thoughts that we must reject. We can still turn to the Scriptures, and study them with a particular focus each time through.

Discussion Guide/Action Steps

1. A child psychologist wanted to observe how different children responded to negative circumstances. They got a room and filled it with horse manure. Putting a pessimistic child in there, they observed how he responded. Predictably, he whined and cried and despaired that he was in a room full of smelly manure. They put a different child in there, and the little guy started

tearing around the room, digging in the manure with an excitement that baffled the on-lookers. After a few moments of watching this, they asked him why he was so excited. He replied, “With all this manure in the room, there’s got to be a pony in here somewhere!”

2. What piles of manure are in your life right now? Are you whining about it? Or are you excited to find the pony that produced it all?
3. Pray and ask God to cleanse your mind. Consecrate your mind and thinking to the Lord. Ask Him to renew your mind. Repent of wrong and sinful thoughts that you have allowed into your mind.
4. How can you do a better job at focusing on positive things rather than on negative things?