



PHILIPPIANS: JOY FOR LIFE'S JOURNEY
HOW TO THINK CORRECTLY • PHILIPPIANS 4:8-9 • 6/5/2022

MAIN POINT

Followers of Jesus focus their minds on that which inspires their worship of God.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What was the last idea that really consumed your mind? Why did it linger in your thoughts?

How does what we think about affect other areas of our lives?

Deuteronomy 6:4-5 stresses the importance of loving God with all that we are, and this includes the way we think. Romans 12:2 encourages disciples to be transformed by renewing our minds. What we think about matters. What we think about most often is a good indicator of our spiritual health. Our thoughts reveal our idols. They disclose what occupies our thoughts also occupies our hearts. In Philippians 4:8-9, Paul wrote about the types of thoughts that should fill our minds.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ PHILIPPIANS 4:8-9.

The word “finally” probably signaled Paul’s transitioning to a new subject and conveyed the sense of “for the rest” (see 3:1). He listed eight virtues on which his friends were to dwell. He wanted believers to concentrate on and practice virtues that characterized their union with Christ.

Which 2 or 3 of these qualities do you appreciate most when you see them?

If we're supposed to "dwell on" these things, what should we do when our thoughts drift to something that does not meet the criteria of verse 8?

Which of the qualities in verse 8 is most lacking in you? What will you need to stop thinking about? What will you think about instead?

The first two virtues Christians were to have and exhibit concerned their thought life. The word "true" has the idea of what is real or genuine as opposed to what is deceptive, illusory, or false. It applies to speech as well as facts. The Greek term translated "honorable" describes something that is worthy of reverence. It has the sense of what is respectable or honest and conveys the idea of Christian behavior that is inviting. The third and fourth virtues had to do with everyday life. The word "just" has the idea of uprightness. It conveys the sense of giving God and others their due—of doing right by them. The word "pure" described something so clean it could be brought into God's presence. Believers were to be models of sexual purity.

Virtues five and six describe the results of allowing Christ to shape believers' thoughts. The word rendered "lovely" also can be translated "attractive" or "winsome." It has the idea of what is pleasing and inspires love. Christian character is to have an appealing beauty. The Greek term rendered "commendable" literally means "fair-speaking." It has the idea of putting a favorable light on something. Almost as an aside, Paul added two virtues in a conditional clause. It has the sense of "because." The phrase "moral excellence" translates a Greek term that described physical, mental, and moral excellence. Believers' outstanding moral character was to contrast sharply to the paganism around them.

What is the difference in living in a way that draws the commendation of others and living to receive the praise of others?

How does thinking in the manner Paul described keep us from living for the praise of others?

Paul expected believers' exemplary conduct to draw people's praise. Believers were not to seek people's approval to boost their egos; rather, they were to live in such a way that others would see the positive difference Christ made in them.

What is the promise in verse 9? What must come before the promise?

Which of the virtues that Paul listed stand out in your life? Which ones need strengthening? How will you keep your focus on the things that are good?

From Paul's preaching and teaching, the Philippian Christians gained instructions concerning the gospel and the lifestyle of a believer. In Paul's consistent Christlikeness, the Philippians saw a

worthy example of a faithful disciple. They were to do (literally, “practice”) what he instructed and modeled. Being consistently Christian involves our living virtuously. The quality of believers’ character is crucial because outstanding virtues give evidence of Christ’s presence and activity.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Where in your thought-life are you not honoring Christ? How can we work on this in a way that is gospel-centric rather than through the power of positive thinking?

How can we open ourselves up to the accountability of others in thinking about what is true, just, lovely, commendable, and praiseworthy?

As thoughts become more centered on Jesus Christ, what difference will that make in the way that we live? How does dwelling upon Jesus allow others to see Jesus in us?

PRAYER

Praise God for renewing our minds. Pray that we would lift our thoughts to Him and be consumed by thoughts that are true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, and praiseworthy.

COMMENTARY

| PHILIPPIANS 4:8-9

4:8. Continuing his strong imperative style, Paul suggested what should occupy our minds rather than anxiety and worry. Paul understood the influence of one’s thoughts on one’s life. Right thinking is the first step toward righteous living. What is right thinking? It is thinking devoted to life’s higher goods and virtues. Thus Paul picked up a practice from secular writers of his day and listed a catalog of virtues that should occupy the mind. Such virtues are not limited to the Christian community but are recognized even by pagan cultures.

True is that which corresponds to reality. Anxiety comes when false ideas and unreal circumstances occupy the mind instead of truth. Ultimately, thinking on the truth is thinking on Jesus, who is the truth (John 14:6; Eph. 4:21). Noble refers to lofty, majestic, awesome things, things that lift the mind above the world’s dirt and scandal. Right refers to that which is fair to all parties involved, that which fulfills all obligations and debts. Thinking right thoughts steers one

away from quarrels and dissensions to think of the needs and rights of the other party. Pure casts its net of meaning over all of life from sexual acts to noble thoughts to moral and ritual readiness for worship. Thinking on the pure leads one away from sin and shame and toward God and worship. Lovely is a rare word referring to things that attract, please, and win other people's admiration and affection. Such thoughts bring people together in peace rather than separating them in fighting and feuding. Admirable is something worthy of praise or approval, that which deserves a good reputation. Pondering ways to protect one's moral and spiritual image in the community leads away from worries about circumstances and possessions that project a different image to the community and which thinking cannot change.

The catalog of virtues Paul sums up in two words: excellent and praiseworthy. The first encompasses what is best in every area of life, the philosophical good for which every person should strive. Here it is especially the ethical best a person can achieve. The second term refers to that which deserves human praise. The catalog of virtues thus reflects the best life a person can live and the best reputation a person can thereby achieve in the community.

Finally, in this verse, Paul gets to his point: think on these things. That, joined with prayer will relieve all anxieties and lead one to praise God and live life the way he desires.

4:9. Is such noble thinking possible. Paul says, "Yes, it is. Look at my example." This is not braggadocio or pride. It is the state every Christian should live in, a state of being an example for all who observe you. The example includes Paul's teaching, the tradition he received from the apostles and passed on, his reputation for Christian living, and the Christian lifestyle they saw him practice. If they obey Paul, God will bless them with his peace (see v. 7; John 14:27; 16:33).