

How to Think in Grief of Pain (Philippians 4:8)

Let's continue our worship in the Word of our God who's a mighty fortress. Worship isn't music only but singing can bring us there and can help soul troubles. Some have family relational tension, others physical health issues, others financial uncertainty worries, others have friend-related burdens, for others it's fears of the unknown that have been dominating your hearts and minds. Only God knows all that's been going on internally or in families or extended families represented in this congregation, but this is a week where much of our church family has been hurting, with many still heavy in spirit.

GCBC has 3 memorial services in 4 weeks (plus 1 offsite: DeWater/Carlton family). 9 days ago Alvin Mee died. 8 days ago was Frank Iarossi's service. Both of their deaths we saw coming but crushing loss to their wives. Then 6 days ago Dean Orr died suddenly, unexpectedly. We praise God they were believers and so are in heaven. But what about us? What are we supposed to think and do? With sudden loss? The cumulative effect hit me in Dean who had just taught a SS class the day before, he just preached to all of you here a month ago on a Sunday morning. Dean preached most Sunday nights for most of this decade...how do I preach today? And what? When sheep die or lose a shepherd (Dean shepherded in his teaching) how do I shepherd when I've lost sheep and feel deep personal loss of one who had shepherded me?

How do you lose one who influences and impacts you, here one day, gone the next? No one has preached or taught here more in this decade than Dean and no one has exhorted or encouraged me more in the ways he did through the years. Not all of you knew him in other settings, but if you knew Dean from the pulpit, you knew his passions and knew him through his personal transparency up front. Many saw him as a pastor (though not officially staff or on the board) and saw him as a pillar of the church. But now that pillar is missing, a part of us. Some of you saw him as a father or grandfather in the faith and so it hurts as much as a biological family member's loss, or more. I've felt this hit me harder than any loss of anyone I've ever known. We've been weeping, grieving. Whether or not you saw him as a friend personally, as I did, whether or not you've been reeling this week and dealing with the emotions some have, we're all called to minister to these families and those who felt like family and to pray and serve and care for all our church family

This year Mac and RJ (pianist) lost a daughter, Diane Carlton lost her sister, Alan's in-law and Brandon's aunt (musicians). Others in our music ministry were also hit hard by Dean's loss. We lost Frank Iarossi playing sax on stage

Wendy, who also used to play piano for us up here has been giving care to Alvin for years along with Bob and Lorna Johnston. Bob in his own health issues quietly faithfully served Alvin privately and will speak publically at his memorial Saturday (pray for Bob). Alvin was very involved in missions and giving. Alvin's more quiet gentlemanly way and rich deep voice also spoke volumes. The faithfulness of Terry Mee and Laura Iarossi to care for aging husbands till death parted, that's a living sermon as good as any Dean gave. Whether people were upfront or behind the scenes, healthy and active or homebound and aging, we need to see them as our family. Dean loved Frank's memorial service 8 days ago. I know he wished others could have been there, he thought it was the best ever, 'out of sight'! If he were here he might urge us passionately 'you need to be at Alvin's memorial next week!'

May this season stir any from apathy to support one another as true family. We lost such faithful servants, may this move us to step up, serve faithfully. Last Sunday we saw in Col 3:16 how when the Word of Christ dwells richly in us we encourage one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. We read and sang from Ps 46 today, be still and know God is God, He will be exalted and He's with us as our mighty fortress. The title for this Sunday: How to Think about Grief or Pain. I was encouraged to that in an old hymn

Be still, my soul: the Lord is on thy side; bear patiently the cross of grief or pain;
 leave to thy God to order and provide; in ev'ry change He faithful will remain...
 Be still, my soul: when dearest friends depart, and all is darkened in the veil of tears,
 then shalt thou better know His love, His heart, who comes to soothe thy sorrow and fears
 ...Be still, my soul: thy best, thy heav'nly Friend thro' thorny ways leads to a joyful end.¹

May God helps us to that end today, that we would be hopeful, even joyful. So with that in mind and with what's been on my mind and heart this week, please turn to Phil 4 and I trust this will be applicable to other situations. In the providence of our God who moves in a mysterious way as He works His sovereign will, the next text in our verse-by-verse study through Philippians I trust has very timely help for us all where we're at or will be in the future. 4:7 ends with peace that guards hearts and minds. The way to keep guarding our minds is v.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.* He who has ears to hear, let him hear God's Word. Let's pray

Our sovereign God. Help me to preach as if never sure to preach again, as a dying man to dying men. I ask as my friend prayed many times, help me be clear and accurate and speak with the unction and power of the Holy Spirit.

The word 'unction' comes from the KJV of 1 John 2:20 that says believers '*have an unction from the Holy One and ye know all things...ye know...the truth...*' Think of the Holy Spirit's empowering and illuminating us to know His truth and how to put it into practice, giving ears to hear and eyes to see truth we wouldn't and couldn't without it. We need to pray for His *unction*, to see our need for power and passion from the Spirit, renewed minds and enflamed hearts, and to be open to the Holy Spirit's leading and guiding and what He's doing. That started for your shepherds this week as we modified what we planned for this week and weekend's services to be sensitive to what God planned. His Word is unchanging, always sufficient and relevant, but the Spirit's *unction* I trust has led and will lead us through this next text.

In God's providence, the next verse in our study through Philippians may be the most important verse in the Bible on how and what to think. It applies to any and every situation, but today I pray His Spirit applies to our situations and any and every heart. As I've walked through this valley with this verse, I invite you to join me in it. I want to work through this text with you in the ways God's been working in my heart this week, starting on Monday night. When sorrows like sea billows roll, how can we say it is well with my soul?

Let's start where v. 8 starts: *Finally, brethren...* (term for family of Christ)

1st point: We need to think and speak as family

Paul's speaking to his spiritual brothers and sisters, his family who he loves. The context starts back in v. 1: *Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown, in this way stand firm in the Lord, my beloved.* Paul's writing to a church in Philippi he hadn't been to in years, and didn't know everyone there personally, but he thinks and speaks of all as family. Monday night started for me with disbelieving, then within minutes intense weeping, and at various times since, waves of grieving repeated and rolling over at unexpected times. Think of family in this church who've lost loved they lived with, or marriage's *one flesh* torn! Some process loss differently emotionally, but where our feelings and thinking go is important to the God who made us emotionally and gave us His Word to help His beloved family

1 Tim 5 commands you to interact with '*an older man...as a father...older women as mothers, and the younger women as sisters, in all purity. Honor widows...*' and he goes on to talk about meeting practical and physical needs of widows. Our deacons and WM team help with that, but that's for all of us and we need to be in prayer for those like Donna caring for Bonnie through this valley of the shadow of death that Donna's still walking through herself.

In Phil 4:3 Paul asks his true faithful companion to help these women who labored together for the gospel. These are his family and these are times to put in perspective what really matters and should eclipse all else, our care and concern for our church family. It puts in perspective 2:14 *do everything without complaining or arguing*. Paul in context as he writes thinks he may be on death's doorstep (chapter 1), his church family in Philippi were only able to write, but don't underestimate the power of writing notes to others. **4:10** *But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned before, but you lacked opportunity...¹⁴ Nevertheless, you have done well to share with me in my affliction [their writing, prayers, gift]...²¹ Greet every saint in Christ Jesus.*

Paul writes from prison thanking them for their concern but some of his last words are to ask they don't neglect others and greet *all the believers*. Times like this in the life of a church should move us to greet or talk with all, older struggling believers as well as anyone who seems to be doing well, knowing they might be here today and gone tomorrow. That literally happened with a brother here last Sunday giving God glory, the very next day gone to glory. These are wake up calls to what matters, God, eternity, being in His family. We obviously think of widows, as we should, but we need to think of others also, and to think about how we think about other situations that trouble us and the troubled among us. What's the biblical process for how to process?

Rom 12:15 says *'weep with those who weep. Be of the same mind toward one another...'* It starts in our mind, how we think toward one another. 1 Cor 12 says in a local church *'God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired...[then it explains no part of the body can say it doesn't need one of the other parts of the body, we're all interconnected and inter-dependent, and it goes one to say we all need] the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it.'* That chapter ends with a mention of teachers, but says love for one another is greatest of all, 1 Cor 13

That passage makes clear we need to give equal attention to the less visible parts of the body, not just the prominent parts. If your toe hurts, that affects your whole body (a toe cut off has a huge impact). We need to remember all who have lost loved ones in the past and show our love to them long after a memorial, keep expressing care. It starts with thinking about what we think about and how we think and make our thoughts God's thoughts in His Word

Christ's first and greatest commandment includes loving God with all your heart and soul **and all your mind (thinking)**. The 2nd greatest command is like it, and inseparably joined to it with those we're joined to: love others as you love yourself. Think and feel about others as you do yourself. First love God with all you are, including your mind, and then use your mind to think of how you'd care for your needs as you show God's loving care to others.

Look at chapter 2 for a little more on how we're to think or speak as family: 2:1 *'Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, ² make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit...*' In v. 20 he says of Timothy he has *'a kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare.'* I like that NAS wording 'kindred spirit,' like we're kin, family, NKJV has *'like-minded who will sincerely care for your state.'* Think and speak that way, as the end of v. 3-4 says, think of the need of others more than yours. v. 5 says we need to have the same mind Christ had, humbly serving others

Use v. 1 as a template to apply this: how can I encourage Laura in Christ? Is there a way I can show comfort to Terry? Keith and Lorraine Eckhardt are a newer older couple in our midst whose daughter died just a few weeks ago. I was blessed to hear they were in a home fellowship dinner Friday night. v. 1 mentions fellowship, think of ways you can be involved in fellowship in their home or yours, or how you might encourage in some way. If you don't know him/her, it's a great way to get to know. Saturday Alvin's memorial is a prime place to start in fellowship of the Spirit. If you have any affection or compassion, even just your coming can give Terry joy like v. 2. I'll leave to the Spirit's unction to apply it, but just think if your mom or dad or brother or sister went through loss in this way, think what would you do for them?

#1. We need to think and speak as family

#2. We need to dwell on what's true, honorable, and right

Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right

...

The end of the verse says *'dwell on these things'* (NAS footnote 'literally, ponder these things'). The ESV has *'think about these things,'* but I think the NKJV says it better *'meditate on these things.'* Thinking things not in v. 8 I can't help at times, but I'm only to dwell on what's in v. 8. This Greek word in other verses is usually translated 'consider, regard' or other words besides 'think.' The idea can be what you count, deem to be true or hold to

Hold onto His ways With shield of faith Against temptations flaming arrows...
 Still my soul be still Do not forsake The **Truth** you learned in the beginning
 Wait upon the Lord And hope will rise As stars appear when day is dimming
 God You are my God [that's what's true] And I will trust in You and not be shaken
 Lord of peace renew A steadfast spirit within me To rest in You alone²

That's where our thoughts need to rest and dwell within us. Our souls spin with other things, but God says to souls '*be still and know that I am God.*' We can't control what we think in terms of what pops in our head at times, but we can control what we dwell on or ponder or meditate on or set our affections on. Don't passively let wrong thoughts drag you down, actively turn thoughts to God's truth, what would honor Him, what He says is right. v. 8 is a guide to apply the command take every thought captive and make it obedient to Christ. Any thought not in v. 8, capture it and make it obey by asking is this true? Does this match what's true in scripture? Is this a noble, honorable or right thing to be thinking about? If not, we mustn't dwell there

One writer fills out ways to dwell on whatever is true: '*When you are weak and insecure*, think about the truth that *God is all powerful*...I can't begin to tell you how many times I have stood beside individuals afflicted with an illness that would eventually take their lives, who nonetheless found their strength in the Lord...[as v. 13 says] "I can do all things through him who strengthens me"...*When you are confused*, remember [what's true] is that *the Lord knows everything*...*When you are lonely*, the truth is that *God is everywhere* [as the end of v. 5 says, and He is near or at hand. The writer says] Perhaps you've lost your spouse of many years and suddenly find yourself alone. Maybe you're a single parent who, after your children are asleep, feel isolated and on your own...the truth is that [God] is with you...*When resources are running low*, the truth is that...*everything belongs to him*. He has also promised to provide for your needs [v. 19]...*When you are doubtful*, remember [the truth] *the Lord is good*.³ Dwell on these things.

#3. Dwell on what's pure, lovely, and good

v. 8 adds *whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute*...

Paul wrote the Corinthians '*I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve... your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ*' (2 Cor 11:3 ESV). Satan wants to lead our thoughts away from a pure focus on Christ. Psalm 119 says how can one '*keep his way pure? By keeping it according to Your Word...Your Word is very pure...*' (Ps 119:9, 140). Pure religion in God's Word, by the way, includes visiting widows, James 1:27.

GCBC has 20 widows, dwell on how to show pure religion or practical care to 1 or more. If you've lost a loved one in Christ, meditate on the pure joys of heaven's glories. John wrote of a heavenly city '*of pure gold,*' even '*the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass,*' and '*he showed me a pure river of water of life*' (Rev 21:18, 21, 22:1 NKJV) and said '*everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure*' 1 Jn 3:2

Be still, my soul: the hour is hast'ning on when we shall be forever with the Lord,
disappointment, grief, and fear...gone, sorrow forgot, love's **purest joys restored.**
Be still, my soul: when change and tears are past, all safe and blessed we shall meet at last.⁴

What a lovely thought that is! Our thoughts need to dwell here: '*How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord almighty*' (Ps 84:1 NIV). Whatever is lovely or of good repute are things we must dwell on, think on and thank God for. Ps 135:3 '*Praise the LORD, for the LORD is good; Sing praises to His name, for it is lovely.*' Phil 4:8 '*...whatever is of good repute/report*' in the ESV is '*whatever is commendable*' - that makes me think of the psalm we read last week '*one generation shall commend your works to another*' and why it's so important to have all generations together in the same worship service. Whatever is commendable we should dwell on: Acts 20:32 '*I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up...*' Other thoughts tear down, but what's commendable, God and His Word builds up. As His Word dwells in us richly, we edify one another in psalms, Col 3:16.

Or hymns: 'God's purposes will ripen fast, unfolding every hour
The bud may have a bitter taste but sweet will be the flower' [lovely thought]⁵
When we think God is frowning, trust His grace and smiling face [He's good]

4thly finally: Dwell on what's excellent or praiseworthy – v. 8 '*if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.*'

When Paul mentions the more excellent way right before 1 Cor 13, it's the way of love. He also writes that we're to excel still more in love, so setting our thoughts on whatever's excellent includes whatever thoughts are loving. Meditating on things worthy of praise is as simple as thinking 'can I praise God for this, or in this?' If not, I shouldn't be meditating or dwelling there.

As we think of this language and what our thoughts must dwell on, we have to think of the excellence of Christ who is worthy of praise beyond anything else we could think of. How excellent is His name in all the earth. In heaven innumerable angels shout with a loud voice "*Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive...praise!*" (Rev 5:12 NIV). Nothing is more praiseworthy in the universe than the name of the Lamb slain. If '*there is any excellence,*' Phil 4:8, there is excellence in '*His name above every other name,*' Phil 2:9!

Phil 3:8 says anything else or less is loss compared to ‘*the excellency of the knowledge of Christ...I count them but dung...*’ (KJV). So why think on things that stink?! If anything less than that knowledge is waste that smells, why would that be where we dwell? Why do we meditate on the worthless when we can meditate on the worthy all-surpassing soul-satisfying Savior?! Set your thoughts on the Lord who sets His thoughts on you as Ps 139 says: ‘*How precious... are your thoughts to me, O God!...Try...my...thoughts...*’

Think on these things of the Lord that are worthy of praise! Heb 1 says His name more excellent than the angels. Ps 150 says ‘*praise Him according to His excellent greatness!*’ If anything is excellent or praiseworthy, it’s His greatness! Meditate on these things, as Peter says, ‘*that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you...*’ (1 Pet 2:9). Dwell on these things of the God who dwells in unapproachable light, the One in whom the fullness of deity dwells, the Word who became flesh and dwelt among us.

Take the last point, what’s pure, lovely and of good report or commendable. Jesus is our *pure* blameless Savior and Priest who purifies us from sin as we put our faith in Him (Heb 9:27, Acts 15:9 NIV). He is altogether *lovely* and has love divine, all love excelling, and He has a love that will not let me go. He has more than a good reputation or good report, He gives good news by His life and death and resurrection for sinners and works all things together for the good of those who love Him who He’s called. ‘*Whatever is of good repute*’ in NIV is ‘*whatever is admirable*’ – 2 Tim 1:10 uses that word for Jesus coming again ‘*to be admired among all those who believe*’ (NKJV).

Take the first 3 phrases ‘*whatever is true...honorable...right...*’ Jesus is the way, the *truth*, the life, and the only way to the Father is through Him. He is full of grace and truth. Phil 1:20 says above all, Christ is to be honored in us whether we live or die. And Jesus is the righteous one who alone can make us right with God if we repent and trust Him so we can think right thoughts. We need the mind of Christ our Savior, and the love of Christ to compel us. Col 3: ‘*...set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.*’ (NIV).

Biblical change passes through the mind to the heart as it changes the soul. We’re not to conform to this world’s thinking, we’re to be transformed by a renewed mind, Rom 12:1, Grk word *metamorphosis*. Think transformation stages of a caterpillar, from egg to pupa to adult, from crawling to cocoon to a brilliant beautiful winged creature soaring in the air to the glory of God.

Think of Frank, whose transformation is complete in glory, no longer bound by his wheelchair or healthcare struggles, his spirit soared to heaven carried as if by wings. Think of Alvin's metamorphosis, not a dead earthly body I saw a week and a half ago, but a renewed glorious existence where Alvin now sees perfectly his beautiful Savior in all His brilliant splendor. No more blood-sugar or breathing issues, his breath praises Jesus his sweet Redeemer

What a thought Dean visited Alvin on earth, then in heaven the next week! Think of Dean and how excited he was as he talked about the things of the Lord and how excited he must have been to see the Lord he loved in person! They were ready. Are you ready if you were to die tomorrow or die today? If not, repent, turn from your sin and trust what He did for your sin, confess Him as your Lord and Savior. Make Him your best thought by day or night. Think of eternity, heaven, who you are in Christ. Seek first His kingdom. Look back at Phil 3:20: *For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; ²¹ who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory...*

We're still waiting for that Savior, the resurrection of glorified bodies isn't until the Lord returns, but until then believers absent from their earthly body are present with the Lord. Paul said in chapter 1 he longed to depart and be with Christ, which would be far better. Our loved ones who are with Christ in glory are in an infinitely far better place. For those who to live is Christ it says in chapter 1, *to die is gain*. There's loss for us, but think of their gain! Paul's saying here think of yourself as heaven's citizens, live for up there.

As we dwell on these things, remember the end of the Bible says *"Now the dwelling of God is with men...He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain... The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' And let him who hears say, 'Come!' Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life...He who testifies...says, 'Yes, I am coming soon.' Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen."* (NIV)

¹ Katharina von Schlegel, "Be Still My Soul."

² Getty Music, "Still, My Soul, Be Still."

³ Timothy Z. Witmer, *Mindscape: What to Think About Instead of Worrying*, PAGE ?

⁴ Katharina von Schlegel, "Be Still My Soul."

⁵ William Cowper, "God Moves in a Mysterious Way."