

Philippians 4:6–9 (NKJV)

6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; 7 and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

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. 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.

This is part 2 in our study in this text. Last week we dealt with what **to do** about our problems, how to **think** about our problems. We are told in verses 6 and 7 how to **respond** when we are tempted to **think anxious thoughts** about our current situation. We are told to **run to God** in whatever fashion of prayer we think to do it. And along with prying we must include the orientation of giving thanks to God while we are pouring out to God our hearts. Essentially the emphasis is to **run to God**, while thinking accurately about who **God** is and who **we** are. We also factor in the **position of peace** we enjoy with God with all its benefits.

This morning we are going to be taught how to think **above** our problems. This is the first of two studies on vs 8 and 9. This is more of that **change in perspective** that we find is so effective for small children. If they will only focus on something else, the cookie they aren't able to have loses its appeal.

Now there are a couple of things to note right at the start.

The command in this passage is to **meditate**. I have taken a stance, and will continue to take a stance, that the normal Biblical remedy for anxiety, and most problems for that matter, is a change in how **we think**. I make this stance because it is what scripture says over and over again.

If I think the way you think, I will very likely feel the way you feel. That is a general truism.

We discussed last week that this is not an absolute. Sometimes things affect our feelings that are not a result of our thinking. But no matter what **causes** the feelings of anxiety, **thinking correctly** will still be as much of a real remedy as we can do. Sometimes we may need to suffer some feelings that are not caused by

our thinking until our thoughts bear their fruit. But over time, **thinking right**, part of which is to **give praise and thanksgiving**, and **praying to God** for help, these are the **scriptural remedies**. So our counsel to each other should be, when we are in a state of anxiety, or fear, or despair, to bring it to God and then obey what Paul said.

And again, I think we best apply this passage if we focus on anxious **thoughts**, not anxious **feelings**. Thoughts we can directly do something about. We do not have direct control over feelings.

Now in our world, the field of psychology has done many studies on anxiety and other emotions. There are patterns of behavior they would label "**disorders**". The symptoms of the so called, mentally ill, are patterns of behavior that do not fit the norm. The experts in what are now called "mental health" fields have drawn various conclusions. Many of those conclusions now are accepted as fact. The only trouble with all of that is that you cannot verify what they refer to as **mental illness** with a microscope. The diagnoses and cures are based largely on observation. And much of the data in the observations comes from the patient's own perspective. There are few scientific tests to run. There are no diseased cells to look at like when you have a physical illness. It is not like the kinds of illnesses that a human body catches. If you catch a cold, there are cells you can see in a microscope. A person can be diagnosed by all kinds of tests with a **brain** disease. But the diagnosis of a **thinking disease** is determined by behavior. And it always has an element of subjectivity. It is very difficult to know what caused it.

I say all this to make this point.

Sometimes our world stumbles onto truth. Sometimes it misses it by a mile. I thank God for the medical advancements that probably have been used by God to keep us and many of our kids alive.

But we must be very careful in our thinking. We must first go to scripture to determine what the Bible says about a thing. The truth from scripture is the truth we can be sure of. Our so called "experts" may have truth that can help us, or they might not. The only way we can know which is which is by going to the Bible first. The Bible does not say anything about colds or the flu. It does not describe treatments for broken bones in any detail.

But the Bible does tell us a **great deal** about our behavior. It talks about fear and worry and anxiety and despair. And it says an incredible amount about our minds. This is the challenge. We can never allow the field of psychology to supersede anything that scripture reveals as truth. Scripture ascribes human beings with certain responsibilities for **ourselves** and our **behavior** and our

thoughts. We must be very careful to never allow something the field of psychology says to have more authority over our lives than scripture does. If scripture says **A** and psychology says **A**, we are free to apply it. If scripture says **A** and psychology says “**not A**”, we must reject it. If scripture says **A** and psychology says **B** (that does not counter A), we are free to consider it.

But we cannot say that just because this field of study has come up with something they **agree upon** and quote it as **fact** that we can **trust** it as being true, no matter how many case studies they quote. Our instincts should start with distrust until the word of God affirms it. That puts the responsibility upon us to fully study what the word of God says.

I am just saying that if we are going to overcome things as Christians, we must start by assuming that God knows what he is talking about more than any mental health expert. And the Holy Spirit through Paul and Jesus says that a large part of the remedy for anxiety is “**Meditate on these things**”.

In our Thursday evening meeting I hope we can freely discuss how this works and ways you all have learned to make best use of the world’s learning and still maintained your submission to scripture.

Ok, so what does it mean to **meditate**?

The word for meditate is log id’ za ma he

It is the word we get logic from.

It means, in this case, to consider, to take account, to weigh, to meditate on.

Basically Paul is telling us to **think** and he is telling us **what to think about**. Those things we are **anxious about**, and those things we are **tempted** to be anxious about require this specific obedience. If we do it, we will get the relief that scripture promises. If we won’t, we will live with the turmoil. To a large degree, our state of mind is determined by whether we will **believe scripture and obey it**, or **not**. We may need lots of help in the process. But we are given very specific commands.

There is a quote from Martyn Lloyd-Jones that I love. He says this about Matt 6:25-34 where Jesus talks about worry in the sermon on the mount-

Faith, according to our Lord’s teaching in this paragraph, is primarily thinking; and the whole trouble with a man of little faith is that he does not think. He allows circumstances to bludgeon him. That is the real difficulty in life. Life

comes to us with a club in its hand and strikes us upon the head, and we become incapable of thought, helpless and defeated. The way to avoid that, according to our Lord, is to think. We must spend more time in studying our Lord's lessons (*in Matthew*) in observation and deduction. The Bible is full of logic, and we must never think of faith as something purely mystical. We do not just sit down in an armchair and expect marvelous things to happen to us. That is not Christian faith. Christian faith is essentially thinking. Look at the birds, think about them, and draw your deductions. Look at the grass, look at the lilies of the field, consider them.

The trouble with most people, however, is that they will not think. Instead of doing this, they sit down and ask, What is going to happen to me? What can I do? That is the absence of thought; it is surrender, it is defeat. Our Lord, here, is urging us to think, and to think in a Christian manner. That is the very essence of faith. Faith, if you like, can be defined like this: It is a man insisting upon thinking when everything seems determined to bludgeon and knock him down in an intellectual sense. The trouble with the person of little faith is that, instead of controlling his own thought, his thought is being controlled by something else, and, as we put it, he goes round and round in circles. That is the essence of worry.... That is not thought; that is the absence of thought, a failure to think. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971, 2:129–30)

We could list thousands of passages in scripture that command us to think. In fact, some have observed that one of the primary differences between Christianity and other religions is that Christianity provides theology that must be **believed** and other religions provide ceremonies and rituals that must be **observed**. Christianity tells us **to think** a certain way so we **act** a certain way. Religions mostly tell people **to act** a certain way.

Sanctification is primarily done in the process of thinking. Everything else is a result of right thinking. And scripture is full of **thinking fuel**.

Now the thing is here, we are prone to meditate. But we are not prone to think the proper way our brother Jones explains.

We are prone to fixate on things in our minds. But we tend to allow our minds to go where they want to go. We meditate. But we meditate on the wrong things. We might meditate on a wrong done to us. We might fixate on a question of how God could allow what He allowed. We might fixate on our inability to face the hardship in front of us. We might meditate on ways to avoid the consequences of our actions or the responsibilities we are facing that are hard. Our minds all fixate

on something. They either fixate on that which makes the anxiety worse, or that which frees us from the anxious thoughts. And we are free to pick that which we will meditate on.

Back to the text. Paul starts with the word **“finally”**. This will be the last thing he has to say about giving instruction to the Philippians. After this, he will talk about their gift and his reception of it. So this is the last thing Paul says in this letter to address the Philippians in regard to helping them in their specific situation.

I think it is very good to remember that they were dealing with a **political power** that was corrupt and unpredictable. And they were likely facing the end of **“life as they knew it”** on several fronts. When Paul addresses their reasons for anxiety, they may have matched many of the reasons **we think we have** for anxiety.

But he launches into things that he commands these people to think about. The assumption is that the **things on his list** are **not** what they would **naturally** think about. They are not likely to think about **these things** unless they make a concerted effort to do it. Does that sound like us? I think it should. We will only think about these things if we **choose** to think about these things. It might take a list on a wall. This won't just **happen** to us. Anxiety will. But this won't.

Now this list is very unusual. The first four are words that Paul has used in other places, although not often. The next two are words that are **borrowed** from the culture. They are borrowed from Greek philosophers. I think this displays that even the worst cultures see some truths. God's grace extends even toward earthly cultures. And the world stumbles onto God's truth and things that are virtuous from time to time. When they do, Paul does not mind mentioning it. Paul's is a list of things we **should** think about as opposed to where our minds will naturally go.

But one more thing.

Really, what is the source of most of the things we think about that make us anxious?

Thoughts of the financial state of our nation can make me anxious. Now, is that because the things I think are not true? No I don't think so. I am looking at facts. I can look at facts about abortion.

I can look at facts about wicked cruelty all over the world.

I can look at all the extra IRS agents just hired.

I can look at how we are regularly being lied to and manipulated.

I can look at facts about all the false teaching being done in the name of Christ.

I can look at injustices done to me.

Are all those things **lies** or **inaccurate**? Probably not. But focusing on those true things can still create anxiety in me.

I know sometimes we even **justify** our anxiety because we are thinking more true about the situation than those who are telling us to **calm down**. We tell ourselves we are just being smart. Often the **facts we are looking at** that cause our anxiety are true. So there has to be something more that Paul is pointing to here. When he tells whatever things are true, he must mean something more than things that are just factual. Our anxiety is not relieved by simply viewing the situation we are in factually.

Really, where does our anxiety come from. The anxiety ultimately comes from not seeing **our God** truthfully. We are not viewing our situation from **God's truth**. I believe that this whole list is designed to lift our view from the **valley** we are in to the **hills** where **our help comes from**.

A while ago I was talking in Sunday school about how this list does not do me much good. I recall it because I felt bad because I interrupted Diane's sharing about how it is very helpful to her. What I was trying to say is that when I see terms like true and noble and just, they sound like lofty things out there somewhere. I cannot put boundaries on them. I haven't known how to apply this in a way that is helpful?

Do you know what I mean? There is nothing wrong with **the list** obviously. But how in the world am I supposed to meditate on things that are so blurry and idealistic?

But after studying this, I think I am now seeing better **how to apply them**.

First off, some have described this passage as the briefest biography of Christ in scripture. And I think that is the best way to **start** our mediation. If anxious thoughts have their root in wrong thoughts about God, would not this list be intended to draw our eyes to Him first?

So if these attributes are perfectly displayed in Christ, then where are we **most likely to find examples** of the most true, noble, just, pure, lovely things? And where do those things reside? Would it not naturally be in **who God is**, what God **has told us**, and what God **has done**?

I am sure this list of questions is not exhaustive, but I think they are helpful. With each item in this list of wonderful attributes, we might best be helped by asking questions like this. We will apply it to the attribute of "**true**" first.

1. **How is Christ true?**

2. **How is what He has done in our lives and the lives of other believers true?**

3. What is true about what He has promised for our futures?

4. What is true about what He has given to us in our pasts?

5. How can we reflect more of that attribute of Christ in what we do today?

I think we can apply this list of questions, or a list like it, to each attribute and for me, at least, it makes it more down to earth. More applicable. We find ourselves with **so much to think about**. So much to **look at**. We are given meaningful work in our own treatment of our thoughts about anxiety.

So let's start with the first virtue.

whatever things are true,

OK so we are going about our lives. And it looks like all the wrong people have power in our world. It looks like wickedness is flourishing. It looks like the bad guys and their agenda are winning.

Or we experience things we think should **not be**. We think this is not how my life should be. This should not be happening to me. This is not right. This is not fair. I cannot handle this setback or this difficulty.

Where do we go? What do we think? Do we allow these thoughts to drive our feelings? Do we allow them to drive us to despair?

Well the first thing to ask is, **what is true?** And ultimately where do we go to find out what is true? Our **experience?** The emotions our **circumstances** inspire? The **feelings** we have about a thing?

No. We will never get to the truth that will lift us out of our anxious thoughts that way. There is a way that seems right to a man. A man has an instinct about things. But that leads to destruction. No that is not the path to truth.

We need to look at **Christ** first. He said I am the way, **the truth**, and the life. He IS truth. All of His words are true. There is no deception in Him. We can trust that when we read about the **life of Christ**, we will be thinking about truth. This is truth we can meditate on. We will never exhaust that consideration.

And then second we know the Word of God is truth.

What does scripture say about this thing? That is truth. We should always go to the truth of Gods word in those circumstances where we are tempted to worry and be anxious.

So we look higher and we see what God says is true about Himself. Then we ask, what is true about Him in **this situation?** Oh, He says He has it under control. Oh He says He will use it for our eternal good. Oh, He says it is serving a useful purpose in my life. Oh, He says He will love me and never forsake me. Oh, this is way more important than the truths that **I was** focusing on. This is a far better meditation than I was practicing earlier.

Do you see how it works? Our attention is drawn to the real problem, the root source of anxiety. And it is our distrust of God to know what is best. So we look to the truth and the truth is the antidote to our anxiety.

whatever things are noble,

This means honorable, dignified, worthy of respect.

This is also the word used for qualities required of deacons, deaconesses and older men. This is the opposite of trivial, temporal, mundane, common or earthly. Noble things are things worthy of awe and adoration and praise. So we are lifted above the common.

Ok, so a horrible thing happens to us. Or it appears that it might. What do we think? We lift our eyes above the circumstance to the God who is behind it. How is Christ noble?

How is Christ **honorable** and **dignified** and **worthy of respect**. Maybe you are being disrespected. But draw your eyes away from that. Quit meditating on that. Are we not here drawn to Christ's life. There was little common about how he **lived his life**. How he **preached**. How he responded to life circumstances. The wisdom he showed in each of his life's events. It was all honorable, dignified, worthy of respect. He lived **above** His surroundings, not in **reaction** to them. He determined what He **would do** because of **who He was** and because of the **mission He had**. He was not drawn down into the gutter of what others might **think of Him** or **do to Him**. He was perfectly Noble.

We can look at those around us, and even things in our lives that have Christ's noble fingerprints on them. We can look at how less than noble **we were** until his love changed us. We are then in the perspective to see our situation differently. We can now ask how can I face this situation that God has provided in my life to glorify Him. How can I make this count for eternity? How can I give praise to God in this circumstance? How can I glorify Christ by the way I handle this circumstance. Think about those noble things. How can I **be noble** based on how **Christ is noble**. Do not focus on the circumstance. Focus on something higher.

How is Christ noble?

How is what He has done in our lives and the lives of other believers noble?

What is noble about what He has promised for our futures?

What is noble about what He has given to us in our pasts?

How can we reflect more of that attribute of Christ in what we do today?

We are going to stop here this morning. I had this sermon prepared as a single sermon. But I could not stop studying. I kept thinking I was missing something. And it expanded into a sermon too big to give at one time. So we will take up the rest of this text next week.

I am looking forward to our conversation on Thursday. I hope that is something that you will attend. And if you have strategies that are effective when you are tempted to think anxious thoughts, I hope you will share that.

I really do not know how this meeting will go. I am hoping this idea is Spirit inspired, not Jon inspired. I know it was based on good intentions. Please bring what you know for the good of the rest of the body. Thursday here and on Zoom at 7pm.

The conclusion to this sermon will be next week on Sunday. We will have a few more sermons on Philippians. We will put off our Daniel introduction to a few weeks after Church Camp.

Maybe the best application for this week will be to practice using the questions I mentioned. Or you can make up your own. Let's see how helpful it is when we follow Paul's prescription for anxiety. I have already placed the list in Slack.