

Philippians 4 (8) – You Are What You Eat

The Apostle Paul was in a difficult situation. He was writing to the Philippians from prison. And he was writing to them about having joy and peace despite difficulties. Paul was a living example of what he wrote.

Besides being in prison, he was dealing with a lot of other bad news and bad stuff. There were people who called themselves Christians who were trying to keep Paul in prison so that they could make more money off people. And even when Paul would get out of one prison, in every city he went to, he was beaten and chased out of town or put into another prison. And there were a lot of issues with the churches he established, too. False teachers, bad doctrine, and foolish people. A lot of bad news and bad situations to deal with. But Paul still had joy. And he wasn't anxious. He was at peace.

How did he do it? How was Paul able to have this joy and peace? And how can you learn to have joy and peace, even when you have bad news?

That's what Paul was teaching in this letter. He uses his own difficult situation to demonstrate a practical principle. This practical principle is the reason why Paul was able to have joy and peace in difficult situations. It was his method for maintaining a level of joy and peace that kept bad news from poisoning his mind, poisoning his life, and making him poison to other lives.

Bad news and bad situations can make for a bad mindset. And that bad mindset can make you prone to anger, bitterness, frustration, and all the other poison that comes with a bad mindset. You need a good, godly way to process bad stuff. Our text today presents that way.

So, Paul shows the Philippians how he applies this practical principle in his own life. And then Paul gives them a test case for them to apply. Again, you can see Paul putting this principle into action right here in this letter. Paul shows them how *he* has put this into practice. And then he gives them a specific case and method for *them* to put this in practice.

What Paul is teaching is not some method to block out all the bad stuff. And it isn't some way to escape all your suffering. Or deny your emotions with some positive mental attitude alone. It's not like you can avoid all the bad news. It's not like you will never get angry. But you can stop the bad news from stirring up your soul into a poison pot of pain.

Bad situations might surround you at times. But you don't have to succumb to the pressures of life and descend into seasons of anger, bitterness, indulgence, strife, and unforgiveness. You can stop anxiety from ruling your life. You can stop destructive thoughts taking over your mind. You can stop turning to alcohol and drugs as coping mechanisms. You can stop self-sabotage. You can stop all that garbage that is eating you up inside.

You can do it the way Paul did it. The way the Bible teaches it. The way God intends for you to do it. Have faith; not so that God will get you out of all your troubles. But so that God will transform your life through those troubles! God is not against you; he is for you. The darkness that you see does not have to overtake you. Instead, you can let God turn on the light. Our text today shows you how. When all around is darkness, and yet you have light, how great is that light! And what a witness is that light.

Paul had to endure prison. And much, much more. Too much teaching today is focused on how to escape suffering. It leaves people unprepared to persevere. And that leads people away from God. I am not a good shepherd of the Great Shepherd if I do not prepare people to persevere. The perseverance message will never be as popular as a false peace and worldly prosperity message. But it is God's message.

Let me prove that as simply as I can. Think of the Revelation, chapters 2 and 3. Jesus' seven letters to the seven churches are for all of us. And each letter promises the blessings of God only to those who persevere through suffering, not to those trying to avoid, deny, escape, or ignore suffering. The message of perseverance is just as valid today as it was then. This is a first century message to a twenty first century people.

You might have heard the old saying, "You are what you eat." And it's true. The basic diet you keep is the basic health you develop. But it is also true that eating something bad can make you feel bad. For example, you can have your blood sugar well under control. That's great. You're healthy in that respect. But even if your overall sugar is under control, and you're diabetic, if you overdo sugar at a meal, it will affect your body for the immediate future. You get tired. You get angry. You get sick. I know this personally.

This applies to your mindset. Your mind needs a good diet. But your mind also needs a way to battle those bad thoughts and bad feelings when they attack. So, this is not just about your overall diet. You may feel good most of the time. But each meal can determine how you feel. Yes, you need to fill your mind good food. Romans 12:2 says you are transformed by renewing your mind. And that's about getting God's word into your mind. But I am not just talking about reading your Bible more. Now, of course, reading your Bible is right and good and necessary. But what I am talking about today not just a diet plan, but also a battle plan. Because you need a process for what to do when those bad thoughts and bad feelings and bad choices seem to be what you want right now. So, what can you do right now, instead? What can help you break the cycle that is breaking you?

Again, you are what you eat. Fill your mind with good food. As a way of life. This is what to do to build up a defense. And *feed* your mind good food. When life gets in the way. This is what to do when you start to stir up, and stew in a bad mindset. What Paul is saying here applies to your overall mental state. But also, to winning the mental battles that you have lost before. Now is your time to win.

So, you get some bad news. You see or hear something evil, unjust, ungodly, or just plain bad in the world, or in a loved one's life, or your own life. It's on the TV, the internet, out in public, on social media, or the radio, wherever. Something makes you mad, or sad, or bad, or worse. You feel like hiding. Or smashing. Or drugging. Or cutting. Or whatever destructive thing you know you shouldn't do. And you want to stop it. But here you are in this moment,

wanting to do it again. And its time to get real about this, because no matter who you are or what you think, no amount of money or time off or tuning out can help you avoid all the bad news. The Bible tells you how to process bad news, not how to avoid it all, or eliminate it all.

So, what do you do, when the bad news is attacking your mind, your will, your emotions? When the bad news makes you think bad things? When it makes you feel like doing bad things? Paul says to do this; feed your mind good food. Right now!

Vs.8 says – *Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.* Paul is summing up what he has been saying. In vs.6-9, Paul gives a prescription for when you are distracted and discouraged by difficulty. He is talking to the whole group, but it applies to individuals as well. And here is a simple outline of what he is saying. Vs.6 – Rid your mind of anxiety by being prayerfully thankful. Vs.7 – This will work, it is greater than your mind, it is God. Vs.8 – Fill your mind with virtue. Vs.9 – Follow this as a way of life. And your life will take on a new shape.

Paul was telling the Philippians to apply his method to a contention between church members. And he is also giving you a method to deal with those “right now” moments when you’re tempted to stir up and stew in anger, anxiety, despair, fear, frustration, indulgence, or other destructive thoughts and behaviors. In these “right now” moments, think about what vs.8 says to think about. Feed your mind good food, right now.

Let me make sure I explain this clearly and carefully. There are two aspects to a vs.8 mentality. Filling your mind, and feeding your mind. You fill your mind as a way of life. You are being changed gradually. You feed your mind when you feel bad. You change your course immediately. When you dwell on a thought, the thought dwells in you. So instead of dwelling on the bad news, meditate on the good news. Marinate your mind with it.

Now you might think there isn't enough good to overcome your bad. And your news might seem to be all bad. But find a wedge into good. Don't stew in the bad, and stir up your mindset into some poison pot of pain that will spill out on others. If you want to stop the poison, you'll have to start somewhere. So, start somewhere. The text doesn't say you need to have a preponderance of good to outweigh the bad. The text says if there is ANY excellence, if there is ANYTHING praiseworthy, feed your mind with that.

You are either walking down the road to bad. Or you are making a road to peace. Change your pattern of process. Stop the cycle of self-sabotage. Find one thing, anything, to start a new process. It takes faith to believe that you can change the course of your immediate life by redirecting your mind. But you can break that old pattern and establish a new pattern. When you see something that makes you mad, or sad, or bad, find one thing to think about that is good, right, just, and true. That's what you need to do.

If you want to change your life, change your mind. You need to be actively and consistently managing your thought life, both what you think, and how you think. Your life is the product of your thoughts. Your actions, your behaviors, your process. You are being governed by garbage or by God. It all depends on what is going into your mind. In terms of your regular diet, and in terms of battle. What is filling you, and what you are fighting with.

A lot of Christians fill their minds with good food. They read their Bible. They read other good books. They listen to the sermons. They listen to godly music. But they still seem to fall apart and fall into sin because they aren't feeding their mind in those moments of battle. You can keep your sword razor sharp. But it won't defend you if you don't use it in the battle.

You apply vs.8 by filling your mind, and feeding your mind. You fill your mind as a way of life. You are being changed gradually. You feed your mind when you feel bad. You change your course immediately. When you dwell on a thought, the thought dwells in you. So instead of dwelling on the bad news, meditate on the good news. Marinate your mind with it.

This isn't denying reality. This is choosing to focus on the bigger reality. In Philippians 1:21, Paul says for me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. Paul says that even if he dies in that prison, he still wins. As a Christian, even when you lose, you still win. That truth is worth meditating on. Stop force feeding yourself bad news. Stop the self-sabotage. When you're feeling mad, sad, or bad, you can still win the battle. Feed your mind good food.

Daily, fill your mind with the virtues of vs.8. These are found in the word of God, and they describe Jesus Christ. And in those moments of battle, feed your mind with the truth of God. This isn't just "think happy thoughts." It isn't a simple psychological trick. It's not the worldly power of positive thinking. This is not trying to eliminate any negative thoughts. This is filling and feeding your mind with godly thoughts. This is the word of God in action in your life. This is inviting the peaceful presence of God.

This isn't ignoring the bad news. This is inserting the good news. This is inserting a wedge into those things that would make you angry, bitter, and upset, and helping to make sure they don't stick into you like a nail. This is prying the nails out of you. This is about finding what you're really looking for, which is peace in the midst of all the problems. This world is dark, and life is often dark, so what Paul is saying you should look for the light in the darkness. If everything was dark, it would be hard to find your way. But if you see a light and you follow your way towards that, it will get brighter and that will give you peace. Think about that. You might feel like you're just walking around in the dark. This scripture shows you how to turn on the light. To process life in a godly, practical way. Feed your mind good food.

Finally, look at vs.9. *What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me – practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.* Paul had been a living example to them. And by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he says that if they, and you, will put into practice what he has taught, and lived, you will be blessed by the peaceful presence of God. All is well in the kingdom, and you are a part of it. Learn to live it. Fill your mind with good food. Feed your mind good food. You are what you eat.