

Think on These things Philippians 4:8

Introduction

16 year old Garrett Leopold was in a Florida hospital, waiting for a heart. Without a heart transplant he would die.

Garret's mom confessed that they struggled to pray for a heart to become available - saying, 'We could only pray for God's will - - realizing that to pray for a heart transplant for our son was asking for another child's life to end.'

His condition had taken a turn for the worse – when Garrett's parents got the call that a donor heart had become available. They felt the twin emotions of joy for their son – but also sadness for the person whose life had just ended.

Susan said of the donor: 'We can never say, 'Thank you' enough for such a gift.'

After the procedure - - Garrett's mother soon found out who the organ donor was. Amanda Pierce – an 18 year old who was a Senior in High School swerved to avoid an accident in front of her and ran into a tree with her vehicle.

Amanda's family located Garrett thru social media [even though the donor process is to be anonymous] – but when they reached out to him – he was not ready to connect with them. He struggled with survivor's guilt knowing that someone died for him to live.

Exactly one year after Amanda passed away – Garrett and his mom met with the family of the girl who saved his life. He brought with him a stethoscope so Amanda's mother could hear her daughter's beating heart. In a powerful and emotional meeting – Amanda's mother Laurie – listened to her daughter's heart beat inside of Garrett – and whispered the words: 'I love you'

Garrett later said: 'I feel really humbled and honored, also blessed to say I received the gift of life through Amanda's heart. God has been good.'

Psalm 136:1 - 'Give thanks to the Lord for He is good.'

When we think of our salvation – we can state that the reason we have a spiritual pulse – is because Jesus went to the cross of Calvary.

Eph. 2:1 - 'and you were dead in your trespasses and sins.'

v. 4 – but God being rich in mercy - - made us alive together with Christ – thru faith – and has raised us up and seated us with Him in the heavenly places

We were in need of a new heart

Not the physical organ – but the spiritual heart – the center of man's moral / spiritual faculties

Jer. 17:9 – tells us that our own heart is diseased

Jer. 17:9 - 'The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick.'

When God speaks of the blessings of the New Covenant – He speaks of the gift of a new heart

Ezek. 36:26 - 'Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.'

If we see things rightly, we should be filled with tremendous gratitude for the gift of salvation. Apart from Christ – we would have perished. Instead – He chose to die for us – then rose again.

As we celebrate Thanksgiving this week – we stop to reflect upon all the things we have to be thankful for.

Of course – thanksgiving should not be a once-a-year occurrence – but rather – something we practice every day.

Jerry Bridges: 'the truth is, our whole lives should be lives of continual thanksgiving. Paul told his audience at Athens that God Himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything [Acts 17:25]. That means that every breath we draw is a gift from God. Everything we are and everything we have is a gift from Him.'

Even the wicked are condemned in part because they refuse to acknowledge that God has been good to them in giving them life and being in this world

Rom. 1:21 [NIV] - 'For although they knew God, they neither glorified Him as God nor gave thanks to Him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.'

The unbeliever does something wrong in his thought life – he thinks / uses his mind in a way that is wicked – and refuses to give thanks to God

The bible points to the importance of the life of the mind in several ways

We are told to love God with all our mind

Matt. 22:37 - 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.'

We are told to have our minds renewed

Rom. 12:2 - 'and do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.'

This morning – I would like to focus in on a verse in Paul’s letter to the Philippians – that refers to the life of the mind for the Christian

If we are to truly express gratitude the way we are called to by God – it will take place in the broader context of disciplining our mind to think the way Paul calls us to in Philippians 4:8

I. The 4:8 Principle - Philippians 4:8

One writer calls this verse the 4:8 principle

Paul gives us a ‘think on’ list - - - a place to focus our thoughts

We have to recognize the importance of what our mind thinks on / dwells on – what our minds feed on – because actions flow from thoughts

That’s why advertisers pay billions of dollars to plant a thought in our head thru commercials / etc.

In the spiritual realm – there are thoughts that are healthy, positive, life-giving, faith affirming

And – there are thoughts that are unhealthy, destructive, non-faith affirming, negative in nature

If we are going to live out the kind of lives God wants us to live in following Him – we need to let our minds dwell on the 1st category of thoughts

We are called to ‘thought management’

*** Imagine having all your thoughts projected up on a screen visible to all!

What would our thoughts show?

Would they be expressions of truth / pure / right / etc.?

Would they be expressions of faith and trust?

- I am so grateful that God has called me out of darkness into the light of truth
- I am so humbled that God has been so good to me . . . sending His Son
- God loves Me and is sovereign over the affairs of my life – I have much to be grateful for
- Surely goodness and lovingkindness shall follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever – Ps. 23:6

Or would our thoughts be expressions of a less positive nature:

- Perhaps we are fuming about somebody who wronged us last week / or even last month!
- Perhaps we are consumed with worry or doubt - - anxious over some event or deadline that is coming soon / some financial concern / health issue
- Or maybe we are indulging in negative thinking - - - the Eeyore syndrome – ‘it’ll probably rain on my birthday and ruin my party’
- Perhaps we are discontent – fixated on something we think we need to be satisfied with life – [if I just had this . . .]

Those thoughts and others like them – are unhealthy – destructive

Paul says right here - ‘weed them out / starve them / get rid of them - - - replace the wrong thoughts with the right kind of thoughts

Reprogram the mind – if it needs it [it does – because our fallen natures]

Tommy Newberry: 'The battle you wage against your human nature is an invisible one that will be won or lost in the mind. Minute by minute, hour by hour in the hidden workshop of your mind.'

It is difficult to control one’s thoughts – in fact – we might even initially scoff at the idea

But – Scripture indicates that we have far more control over our thoughts than we recognize – and are commanded to direct our thoughts in certain directions

II Cor. 10:5 - 'We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.'

To engage that battle of one’s thought life is nothing less than spiritual warfare

Satan wants you to have an undisciplined thought life
He wants you to be open to his lies / lies of the world
He wants you to think in ways that do not reflect faith and trust in God

Things to think on:

1) **True** – as opposed to false / unreliable – ‘this is valid, reliable’

*** Truth is what we find in God’s Word

John 17:17 - 'Father - sanctify them in the truth; Thy word is truth.'

God's Word will correct wrong thinking / untrue / unhealthy

II Tim. 3:16, 17 - 'All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.'

Why is the Word so profitable?

Because it is true - - - it exposes the falsehoods we hear in the world – or suggested to us by our flesh

When we hear a thought that is just not true - - - not grounded in the Word – we need to reject it – settle our minds on the truth

Great example of this

There is a story of a coal miner – who – although he was a strong believer – he was injured at a young age – became an invalid – no longer able to work.

Over the years – he watched thru a window near his bed as life seemingly passed him by. He watched fellow workers marry, raise families, have grandchildren. He watched the company he had served thrive without attempting to make adequate provision for his loss. He watches as his body withered, his house crumbled and hope for better things in life died.

Then one day when the bedridden miner was quite old – a young man came to visit him. “I hear that you believe in God and claim that He loves you.” – said the young man. “How can you believe such things after all that has happened to you?”

The old man hesitated and then smiled. He said, ‘Yes – there are days of doubt. Sometimes Satan comes calling on me in fallen down old house of mine. He sits right there by my bed – where you are sitting now. He points out my window to the men I once worked with whose bodies are still strong, and Satan asks, ‘Does Jesus love you?’ - - - then Satan makes me look at my tattered room as he points to the fine homes of my friends and asks again, ‘Does Jesus love you?’ Finally – Satan points to the grandchild of a friend of mine – a man who has everything I do not – and Satan waits for the tear in my eye – before he whispers in my ear: ‘Does Jesus really love you?’

The young man was spellbound by the old man's honesty. He couldn't wait to ask: ‘and what do you say when Satan speaks to you that way?’

The old miner replied: ‘I take Satan by the hand and I lead him to a hill far away called Calvary. There I point to the nail pierced hands, the thorn-torn brow, and the spear pierced side. Then I say to Satan: ‘Doesn't Jesus love me?’

That's the power of truth – and that is why Paul calls us to think on what is true

Jesus told us that Satan is a liar and the father of lies

John 8:44 - 'he is a liar and the father of lies.'

What lies might he bring today?

Here are a few:

- God doesn't love you / doesn't care about you – [look to the cross]
- Satisfaction in life comes from owning more stuff!
- You can sin – and there will not be any consequences
- God is just a myth - - - man is the product of random chance processes that did not have him in mind
- There won't ever be a day of judgment

Satan's lies are extremely dangerous – because they lead to sin / doubt / folly

When we were in Alaska – on the youth mission trip - - - one day we went to visit a Glacier area - - - which is basically very old ice / snow - - - with a few pockets of water here and there

Our guide told us that the pockets of water were very dangerous – because the water is freezing – and the hole may be hundreds of feet deep – no real bottom that you can touch

One moment you are on solid ice – the next – you could slip and be submerged in ice cold water with no bottom to the pool

The water holes looked relatively harmless – [in fact – we joked about getting on a piece of ice and floating to the other side] but truth was – there was danger present

The lies of the world / Satan – always appear harmless – but in reality – they are deadly – just as deadly as those water holes – if we give them time in our thoughts

Remedy: saturate our minds with truth

Col. 3:16 - 'Let the Word of Christ richly dwell within you.'

Some of the other terms Paul uses: honorable / right / pure / lovely / of good repute / anything excellent / worthy of praise

Who or what is worthy of praise? [God is]

Spend time thinking thoughts of God – as He is revealed in Scripture to us
Live in His presence – recognizing that He is near at all times

Say with David: 'The Lord is my shepherd – I shall not want . . .'

When we come to discipline our minds in this direction - - - it has a positive effect on our spiritual lives

Imagine the opposite

Tommy Newberry: 'Paul's advice in reverse: 'Finally, folks, whatever is untrue, dishonest, unjust, impure, ugly, negative, vicious or worthy of criticism, think about these things.' [The 4:8 Principle]

Those kinds of thoughts are not helpful – they have their source in the world / flesh and the devil - - - they are not from God / not of the truth

There is another thought we want to bring in here – as it relates to Thanksgiving

II. The Power of Gratitude - I Thess. 5:18

Paul calls us to give thanks in everything - - - to have a grateful heart

I Thess. 5:18 - 'In everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.'

Gratitude is God's will

Gratitude is a positive / life affirming / healthy state of thinking

Gratitude promotes holiness

I don't need what Satan offers because I am already blessed - - - and grateful with what God has given me

Gen. 3:1-6 – Eve did not focus upon what she had - - - she focused on the one thing withheld

She failed to be thankful for all the good God had given – and reached out to sin because of that

Paul Tripp: 'If she had focused on what she had been given and what had been provided, she would have had little interest in the words of the Tempter.'

She listened to what was untrue / impure / unworthy

*** Gratitude is a heart issue – not a possession issue / or a circumstance issue

Tommy Newberry: 'Life is always a mixture of good and bad. Whether you choose to count your blessings or choose to complain, it's helpful to understand that you have a choice.'

Count your blessings this week! It's healthy / positive / life-affirming - - - and it's God's will

Tommy Newberry: 'You are going to draw more joy out of your business, out of your marriage, out of your family life, and out of all other aspects of existence when you make a commitment to become a genuinely grateful person. The power of gratitude is undeniably immense.'

To engage in serious gratitude is to engage in spiritual warfare

It is to align your heart and mind with the truth – to glorify God in your heart

Conclusion

We are called to think on what is true:

Truth is: 'For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.'

C.J. Mahaney: 'Don't grow over familiar with forgiveness . . . nothing in all creation is more steeped in the miraculous than the fact of your forgiveness and mine.'

Marvel at the cross – that God would come and take a hell-bound sinner - - - and give them a new heart - - - a new pulse - - - thru the incredible sacrifice of His Son - - - and you will be filled with gratitude