

Think it! Do it!

A study of Philippians: Philippians 4:2-9

You catch a child in the act and ask, "What are you thinking?"

The child is taken back because of the tone of voice or the surprise of being caught in the act. Then the child fades into a blank stare as if to truly contemplate what is taking place. You wait in anticipation as they turn to look at you signaling that they are about to answer your question.

Their response, "I don't know."

It does not matter what the child was doing. It may have been the child was showering baby power all over the room or maybe painting his little brother's face with black permanent marker. The child may even have been trying to see how many toys can get stuck in the white chair next to the bathtub. I have two boys so I know this stuff takes place.

On one occasion or more, I have become a little agitated when my one of my sons did not think about the repercussions of their actions. It is then that God reminds me that they are still learning and growing and it takes daily tutoring to help them grow.

"I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord. Indeed, true companion, I ask you also to help these women who have shared my struggle in the cause of the gospel, together with Clement also and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life."

Philippians 4:2-3

It is kinda like my own life.

Describe a time when you did something and then wondered, "What was I thinking?"

We have all been there. In fact, it is not too hard to remember those times. I use the plural because most of us have more than enough examples, but that's okay. We just need to learn to think and Paul helps us with that.

He has spent most of the letter encouraging and challenging the church to be unified and live what they believe. He has given them several examples that they can learn from. He has told them it is not about who you are, but who you serve.

What is one of the things you have learned so far through the study of Philippians?

Read Philippians 4:2-9.

As he comes to a close, he gets even more personal. He has just told them to stand firm – and this is how. He starts off by naming two leaders in the church who are struggling at the very thing Paul has been encouraging.

What is it like to be called out on something?

Paul was not trying to embarrass them or make them look bad. He was, however, trying to emphasize the need for both of them to work through it because he uses the verb παρακαλω twice, which we translate "I urge you". This word is used of the Holy Spirit and can mean comfort, exhort, or call for with a stronger force than just asking. Paul is appealing to each woman separately to live in harmony.

What do you think it is like to live in harmony?

The word harmony goes way beyond just agreeing. It encompasses what Paul has been writing about. It is a unity and harmony of actions, attitudes, and feelings. He wants them to be one in spirit. No one knows who these two women are, but it does seem that they are leaders in some way in the church, whether they are deaconess or small groups meet in their homes. Either way, Paul calls them to set the example.

Sometimes harmony can be accomplished by people and sometimes those people need help. Paul calls upon some other person to help these two women in harmony. It is unclear who Paul is talking to, but some feel he is seeing the church as a collective in helping these two women. Paul calls upon them because these two women have been a great help in the spread of the gospel and now he wants to protect their testimony because they have been a big help in the past, like Clement and others who are written in the Book of Life. Paul makes sure that the church knows these women are believers unlike the people spoken of in chapter three who went after their own interests.

Why do we struggle at accepting guidance in the middle of conflict?

Our personal values and interests can sometimes get in the way of harmony and God may at times send someone along to help us and the other person reach harmony.

In verse four, Paul again redirects their attention to what our focus should always be. We are to be rejoicing in God. Harmony and unity is a God thing, so keep fixed on him. Continue to rejoice and allow this mindset to pour out into others, which leads Paul into his next commands.

How can rejoicing help in harmony?

Paul also calls the church to let their gentleness be known to all men. The word Paul uses is hard to translate but has the idea of not demanding your own rights. It is a courtesy and respect for others even if your rights are being pressured.

Then, without warning, Paul throws in a phrase, "The Lord is near." This can be translated as a space and time thing and can follow what has just been said and precede what is about to be said. It is as if Paul is reminding the church that God is right here with us to help us accomplish all this and his return is getting closer, so persevere.

It may be because of the reality of God being so near and heaven being so near

*"Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near."
Philippians 4:4-5*

“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”
Philippians 4:6-7

that Paul leads into commanding the church to stop worrying. It is the idea of worrying over things which you have no control over. The way to stop worrying is to pray and continue to pray. Paul is convinced that it is easy to be anxious about nothing when you are praying about everything. Paul sees that there is a release from worry and anxiety when we pray. Prayer helps us to see our circumstances in light of the eternal God rather than trying to see God in our circumstances.

What are you worried or anxious about right now?

Have you committed it to regular prayer?

Paul accents this appeal to prayer through your worry by linking thanksgiving to it. It is a mindfulness of thanking God for how He will see you through. It is the idea of perspective that Paul introduced in chapter one and carried through the letter. The more we pray through our worries, the more we are able to see God carrying us through.

Paul does not leave us hanging. He tells the church that peace comes when you seek the God who answers rather than seeking answers from God.

Are you guilty of demanding answers from God? Why do we do this at times?

Again, our self interest gets in the way. It is no wonder Paul gave examples of what it means to look after God’s interest. It is so easy to fall back, but when we look at God’s interests we receive the peace of God.

The expression “the peace of God” is a phrase not used anywhere else in Scripture. Paul seems to be referring to the peace of God’s personal being, God’s own peace, or his very nature. This is different from the phrase “the God of peace” used in verse 9. God’s peace is able to produce better results than any human planning and devising or security that can be constructed. God’s peace is the ultimate.

Paul explains why. He says this peace will guard. Of course, Paul pulls in a military term again as he so often does. It is a picture of a detachment of guards standing over something to protect it. God’s peace is protecting the heart, which is the seat of emotions here, and the mind, which are the thoughts.

How does God’s peace guard or hearts and minds?

Paul recognizes that the enemy seeks to attack the inner Christian’s life. God’s peace protects our emotions and thoughts. This is not the only time that Paul writes about the unseen attack of the enemy. He knows we do not wrestle against flesh and blood (Ephesians 6). The enemy loves to use doubt and discouragement to get at believers, but God’s peace dispels doubt and discouragement.

Paul then comes to verse eight and nine in which he is concluding his intense commands with a final word. He commands the church to think (8) and act (9). The term λογίζεσθε is the imperative meaning to think, ponder, reckon, calcu-

“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. The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.”

Philippians 4:8-9

late, or take into account. It is not simply a causal meditation, but an intense pondering or evaluation. Here is what he is calling us to think on:

- Things that are true – truthful in speech and thought and action
- Things that are honorable – this is a word linked to nobility or majesty
- Things that are just – giving duty and responsibility to God and man
- Things that are pure – ceremonial cleanness – purity in motives and actions
- Things that are lovely – those things which are universally admirable and bring affection
- Things of good report – things that will not offend others, but win them over

How can you allow this list to “filter” what you think about?

Paul recognizes that there are things in this world that fall into these categories. This list is not a “Christian” list per se, but a general list. Paul does then qualify this list by the second command to act in verse nine. This idea of action is not a new idea. Paul has been challenging the church to live out their salvation in the community. Here is what they are to act on:

- The things they have learned from him – These are the things that Paul has taught them and are more specific in nature as opposed to the “whatever things” in the preceding verses.
- The things they have received from him – These are things that have been passed to Paul and now onto to them with the anticipation that they will pass it on.
- The things they have heard about him – These are characteristics that others have seen in Paul and passed on. It may be how he handles trials, etc.
- The things they have seen in him – Paul lived what he preached. He did not leave them without a clear pattern. Christians are called to show others what it is to be a Christian.

What are some things that you can do to act on this?

Paul has just provided the church with the key to living the Christian life. He essentially says, “be accountable to each other and live in peace. Keep your eyes fixed on God, respect others, don’t worry, but pray, think on these things, do these things.

The result – The God of peace will be with you.

Translated – you never have to be alone. This is a powerful statement coming from a man who spent many nights alone in jail.

Paul’s perspective is amazing.

What do you need to do in response to this lesson?
