

The Book of Philippians

Lesson 12: Think on These Things; Content in Christ -- Philippians 4:8–13

We are what we think about. Long before our hands act, our minds have already rehearsed the deed a hundred times. The thoughts we feed in private become the people we are in public. Paul knows this, and so after telling the Philippians how to deal with anxiety, he turns to the deeper matter of what fills the mind in the first place. Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, pure, lovely, commendable, think about these things.

It is a list worth lingering over. In a world that pours filth, fear, outrage, and emptiness into our minds through a thousand screens, Paul calls us to a deliberate diet of the true, the noble, the lovely. He is not naive about the darkness, he is writing from a prison. He simply knows that a mind dwelling on what is good is being quietly shaped toward the good, and a mind marinating in what is base is being shaped toward baseness.

Then Paul turns to one of the great secrets of the Christian life, contentment. He thanks the Philippians for their gift, but quickly adds that he has learned to be content whatever his circumstances. Note that word, learned. Contentment did not come naturally to Paul any more than it comes naturally to us. He learned it, in the school of plenty and the school of want, discovering a peace that did not rise and fall with his bank account or his comfort.

And then comes the famous verse, so often torn from its home and pasted onto locker rooms and motivational posters. I can do all things through him who strengthens me. Paul is not promising that Christ will help us win games or achieve our dreams. He is saying something far better. Whatever circumstance God hands him, abundance or hunger, freedom or chains, he can face it, because Christ supplies the strength. As we study, two questions press on us. What are we feeding our minds, and have we learned the secret of contentment in Christ?

Group Discussion: Paul tells us to think about “whatever is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely” (4:8). How do you think the things we habitually let our minds dwell on actually shape the kind of person we become?

Personal Reflection: Paul says he “learned” to be content in any circumstance (4:11). On an honest scale, how content are you right now, and what is the main thing you tell yourself you need before you can be content?

Read Philippians 4:8–13

Study Questions

1. Paul instructs us to “think about these things,” listing whatever is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, and commendable (4:8). What does this teach us about the importance of guarding and directing our minds, and why does it matter so much what we dwell on?
2. Be honest about your mental diet, what you scroll, watch, read, and replay in your mind. What are you actually feeding your thoughts, and how is it shaping you? What would it look like to change the menu this week?
3. Paul moves from thinking to doing, “what you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you” (4:9). Why does Paul insist on practice, not just right thinking, and what is the connection between obedience and the presence of the God of peace?
4. Name one truth you genuinely know but have not been putting into practice. What has kept it in the realm of knowing, and what would it take to actually practice it?
5. Paul says, “I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content” (4:11). What does it mean that contentment is something learned rather than a natural feeling, and where is it learned?
6. Where does discontentment have the strongest grip on you right now, in your possessions, your circumstances, your relationships, your body? What is it you keep believing you need in order to finally be at peace?
7. Paul says, “I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound” (4:12), treating both want and plenty as conditions to be navigated. Why is abundance often just as great a test of contentment as need, and how can plenty quietly endanger the soul?
8. Think about the seasons of plenty in your own life. Do you find it harder to lean on God when things are abundant and comfortable? How might prosperity be testing your heart right now?
9. Paul concludes, “I can do all things through him who strengthens me” (4:13). In the context of contentment in want and plenty, what is Paul actually claiming here, how is this verse often misused, and what does it teach us about the true source of a believer’s strength?
10. Look back over the whole passage. Paul calls you to a disciplined mind, a practiced faith, and a learned contentment grounded in Christ’s strength. Name one specific way Jesus is using these verses to form you, whether toward a cleaner mental diet, deeper obedience, or genuine contentment in him.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Romans 12:2, being transformed by the renewing of your mind; Colossians 3:1–2, setting your mind on things above; 1 Timothy 6:6–10, godliness with contentment being great gain, and the love of money a root of evil; Hebrews 13:5, being content with what you have because God will never leave you; Matthew 6:19–21, laying up treasure in heaven where your heart will follow.