**Philippians 4:8-9**

**Staying Positive in a Negative World**

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I want to us to consider one more time how God’s word addresses our response to COVID-19 before we move back to our series in Ephesians, Brought to Life; Brought Together. Reading and listening to the news outlets one notices that they are biased toward negative news, focusing on what is wrong with our world. The headlines about the Coronavirus are no different, it is all about disease and death and the devastating predictions about the economy, the stock market, and our lives. Research tells us that all this negativity takes its toll on us. Several years ago, the British newspaper The Guardian ran an article by journalist Rolf Dobelli entitled, “News is bad for you and giving it, up will make you happier.” He states that the news leads to fear and aggression, hinders creativity, and the ability to think. He goes on to say that it misleads, is toxic to the body, and inhibits thinking.[[1]](#footnote-1) We cannot ignore the news but we can counteract the imbalanced flood of information that is destructive to our spiritual health and growth. We must fight to wade against this imbalance of negative information.

Take your bible and turn to Philippians 4:4-9. If you don’t have one just listen as I read. Let me set the context for you. Paul has just told us that when we take our concerns to God in pray, He will guard our hearts and our minds (6-7). Now Paul tells us that God guards our minds by thinking on what is excellent and praise worthy (8). So, pray about our anxieties and think hard about what is excellent and praiseworthy and the God of peace will be with us. It is prayer and a healthy mental diet that guards our minds and leads to spiritual strength and spiritual growth. Paul gives six categories or food groups for a healthy mental diet which we consume by thinking on them (8). Intentional consumption of these food groups will guard our minds against the negative affect of the news and the media.

So, let’s look at these six food groups of a healthy diet.

1. **Truthful Over Falsehood**

First, he tells us to think on whatever is truthful over whatever is false. We see this in the first phrase, finally brothers, think about whatever is true. The gospel binds us together as a family, brother (and sisters). In this time when we cannot meet together, we can still meet together. God has blessed us with technology to continue to share and care with one another. Life Groups and Discipleship Groups are using Zoom to meet together. We have set up Slack, an online forum for connecting, for news, for ministries to stay connected, for prayer, and a number of other ways to stay connected. Think of the testimony to the city if the church in Homer came out stronger because of the coronavirus. Secondly, notice the word whatever is repeated. He is not talking about just Christian sources but any source we encounter daily - whether you are reading your bible or a book, being part of a life group or conversing with a stranger, listening to a sermon or a lecture at school.

True includes anything that conforms to Scripture and the gospel. Whether that is theology, economics, or conversation with your neighbor. No news source is ever going to give you the whole truth, unless it is from a Christian perspective. No news source is going to tell you that God is sovereign over the pandemic. Be discerning and check the facts before you start telling others about what you read or heard. Think on whatever is truthful rather than false.

1. **Noble over Vile**

Second think on whatever is noble over whatever is vile. This comes from the phrase, whatever is honorable. Honorable means virtuous or respectable. Do not listen to or watch what highlights human depravity, filled with darkness and violence that is not redemptive. Think about whatever is noble rather than vile.

1. **Right over Wrong**

Third, think on whatever is right over whatever is wrong. We see this in the phrase, whatever is just. Just is whatever conforms to God’s moral will. The news and the media has blurred the line between right and wrong for so long that what used to be wrong is now accepted as normal and is celebrated. Is what you watch or read or hear celebrating what is morally wrong?

1. **Purity over Filth**

Fourth, think on whatever is pure over whatever is filth. Paul says this in the phrase, whatever is pure. Purity is like a white wedding dress garment unstained by impurity. Our eyes are like spotlights that shine across the landscape and sees everything out there. When the light hits something filthy move away from it. If your spotlight tends to hone in on filth, it is because there is filth in our hearts. If that is the case, repent of it and ask Jesus to change your heart. Thinking on what is pure is what will change the polarity of your mind. Then tell someone in your Life Group or Discipleship Group, and set up parameters to protect yourself from the filth.

1. **Beauty over Ugly**

Fifth, think on whatever is Beautiful over whatever is ugly. This comes from the phrase whatever is lovely. Lovely is anything that draws us toward love. Look for and focus on whatever highlights what is beautiful or lovely in life rather than what is broken or the ugly side of life. Beauty includes enjoying creation. Getting outside and seeing the beauty of life and nature does wonders for the soul. Get out and soak up the wonder of God’s creation. Watch the sunrise or the Northern lights. Just sit and take it in.

1. **Praiseworthy over Complaint**

Sixth, think about what is praiseworthy over whatever is complaining. We see this in the phrase, whatever is commendable. It is a word that means good report and affirms the good. Listen to or watch what is worthy of being lifted up as a model for life and living. Listen to and watch whatever is going to give you a spiritual updraft.

Then Paul summarizes these six categories or food groups as anything that is excellent or worthy of praise. Think on whatever is excellent and worthy of praise! But this is not just a suggestion, it is to be practiced or obeyed. We see this in the next verse, what you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things (9). He challenges us to obey his teaching, what you have learned and received, and to follow his example, what you have heard and seen. Biblical truth is not just taught at a distance, it is also modeled. Making disciples is not just teaching a class, it requires banding together so that we rub off on each other.

He ends with a promise, practice these things and the God of peace will be with you. Paul concluded vv. 4-7 with the promised that if we pray about everything “the peace of God” will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Now, Paul concludes with the promise that if we think on these things and then put this into practice, “the God of peace” will be with us. The “peace of God” will be in us and the “God of peace” will be with us. What more could we possibly hope for in uncertain times. When all we hear is doom and gloom.

**Life Group Questions:**

1. What are your concerns about the Coronavirus?
2. Why does Paul address the Philippians as brothers (and sisters)?
3. What does the church as a family mean to us personally?
4. Why does Paul use the word whatever with ever phrase in verse 8?
5. What is the difference between the promise of the peace of God (7) and the God of peace (9)?
6. What is the connection between thinking and practicing?
7. Why does Paul tell us to both practice his teaching and his life?
8. How is this message speaking to me?
9. How does this message help me in my discipleship to Jesus?
10. How does this message help me in making disciples?

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2013/apr/12/news-is-bad-rolf-dobelli>, accessed March 24, 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)