

# How to Control Your Thought Life, Part 2

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**Main Scripture Text: Philippians 4:4–8**

*“Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.”*

PHILIPPIANS 4:8

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## Introduction

Find in God’s Word, please, Philippians chapter 4, and in a few moments we’re going to begin reading in verse 4. And what we have now is the second part of this morning’s message, “How to Control Your Thought Life.”

They put on cigarette packages that “Smoking may be hazardous to your health.” And I want to tell you, dear friend, that wrong thinking can also be hazardous to your

health. And so tonight we're going to have a check-up from the neck up. We're going to find out if you have been guilty of bad thinking. And I want to give you tonight a spiritual formula for dealing with the wrong kind of thoughts: depression, self-pity, worry, fear, anger, and all of these many things. "Ha," you say, "preacher, what do you know about it, anyway? I mean, you've always had it easy all of your life. You've never had any problems; so who are you to tell me about these things?"

Well, the truth of the matter is I want to tell you what someone else said—his name was Paul—and what he wrote in a slimy hole called the Mamertine Prison as a sufferer and a prisoner for preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ, okay?

Now I want you to hear what the Apostle Paul had to say, and I begin in verses 4 through 8: "*Rejoice in the Lord always...*"—who said that? Paul. When did he say it? In prison—"*Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice.*" Thank you, Jim, for singing those great choruses tonight on joy and "peace like a river." "*Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice. Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand. Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus*"—now, remember we're talking about controlling your thought life—"...*the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep*"—and the word *keep* means "guard; shall guard your thoughts"—"*your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.*" (Philippians 4:4–8)

Now the Bible says, "As a man thinketh, so is he." (Proverb 23:7) And I want to show you tonight how to guard your thought life. Now, just let me give you a recapitulation and a synopsis of this morning's message. We said that an unsaved man has a blinded mind. The god of this world has blinded the minds of them that believe not. By nature, we have what the Bible calls a carnal mind that is at warfare with God.

And so we said, in order to control your thought life, first of all, what? The carnal mind must be converted. But then we showed you also that a converted mind may be corrupted. Paul essentially said, "I have a concern, lest Satan corrupt you through his subtlety from the simplicity which is in Christ; that your minds be corrupted." (2 Corinthians 11:3) Satan can come in and seduce us, and even a Christian's mind can be drawn away. Satan can build into that heart and into that mind what the Bible calls a "stronghold."

And so we said then that a corrupted mind must be conquered. You must take that ground back. And we showed you how to do that. Then we said that a conquered mind

must be controlled, and that the Lord is to be in charge of our new mind. I said—and I hope that you will remember—that you can choose your thoughts like you choose your friends.

Now we talked about the fact that you have to have some sort of a standard to know what kind of thoughts that you can allow into your mind and what kind of thoughts you can say “no trespassing” to. That’s what I’m going to talk about in the message tonight. Paul, when he’s getting ready to give this standard, first of all, builds sort of a context in which you can do what I’m talking about. And let me give you three or four things that he says just to set the stage.

#### **A. You Are to Find Your Joy in the Lord**

He says, first of all, in verse 4, that you’re to find your joy in the Lord. Now he doesn’t say, “Rejoice always.” That would be silly if he just said that. But it’s not silly when he says, “*Rejoice in the Lord always.*” (Philippians 4:4) Rejoice in the Lord. Find your joy in the Lord.

Every Christian who is controlling his thought life will have a conscious joy; he will have a continual joy; he will have a conspicuous joy; and he will have a contagious joy, if he finds his joy in the Lord.

Did you know that I stay busy? I have been very, very, very busy the last two or three years. And I work long hours. Even when we have time away, as we recently had, I still find myself very, very busy. But I have found the secret of strength. I really have. The joy of the Lord is my strength. Really. That’s not a slogan; it’s not a song; it is a downright reality.

There are times when I leave my office to come up here to preach and I find my body getting weary and I find my mind getting tired. I just stop and I say, “Jesus, I love you. I thank you for who you are and what you mean to me.” And I’ll quote this verse: “*The joy of the LORD is [my] strength.*” (Nehemiah 8:10) And, folks, I feel power and strength that comes into my mortal body. “*The joy of the LORD is [my] strength.*”

You see, we are to rejoice in the Lord. Jesus said in John 15, verse 11, “*These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.*” (John 15:11) And, by the way, it’s only joy in Him that remains. If you get your joy any other place, something can take it away. I’m glad Paul didn’t get his joy in his freedom, because if he got his joy in his freedom, he wouldn’t have had it when he was in prison.

Don’t get your joy out of circumstance. Don’t get your joy out of amusements. Don’t get your joy out of business. Don’t get your joy out of friends. Don’t get your joy out of your health only. Those things can give you joy, well and good; but don’t let them be the ultimate source of your joy. “*Rejoice in the Lord always.*” Joy in him is full, and it is

complete.

## **B. Remember That God Is Near**

Now, the second thing—we're just setting the stage now: Find your joy in the Lord, okay? We're talking about how to have a healthy mental attitude. Secondly, always remember that God is near—always remember that God is near. Recognize his presence continually.

Look, if you will, in verse 5: *“Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand.”* (Philippians 4:5) Now he doesn't mean that Jesus is coming soon. He is coming soon; but that's not what he meant by that. What he meant by that is, “Hey, He's right here with me in this prison cell. The Lord is at hand.”

Jesus said, *“And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever.”* (John 14:16) The way to have a healthy mental attitude is to find your joy in the Lord and to constantly practice the presence of the Lord. You see, when you can do this, the wonderful thing about it is that your problems are His problems. Paul said, “I'm here in prison; but so is the Lord Jesus.” He didn't come to get you out of trouble; He came to get into trouble with you. Isn't that wonderful? And Paul said, “I'm in prison; but He's in here too. The Lord's right here with me.”

I was reading about some prisoners back in Stalin's day when they were really persecuting Christians and putting them to death. There were thirty Christians who were meeting in a building. Stalin's crash troops came in there to persecute these Christians, and they were making a list and they counted them. And one of the officers said, “One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine—there are thirty in this room.” And one of them spoke up and said, “No, you're wrong. There are thirty-one. Jesus is here with us. Jesus is with us.”

## **C. Refuse to Worry About Anything**

All right now, the third thing: first of all, just find your joy in the Lord; secondly, recognize His constant presence; thirdly, just refuse to worry about anything. Look in verse 6: *“Be careful for nothing.”* (Philippians 4:6) Now this word *careful* here, the Greek word, means “to be pulled apart.” That's exactly what worry does. Worry just pulls you apart. Over here is fear; and over here is hope; and you're just being pulled between the two. Paul says, “Hey, don't worry about anything.”

### **1. Worry Is Worthless**

You know what Jesus said about worry? Jesus said it's worthless. No one can add a cubit to his stature by worry. (Luke 12:25) Worry never solved a problem, lifted a burden, or dried a tear. It's worthless.

### **2. Worry Is Wasteful**

But not only is it worthless; it's wasteful. You know, it just takes energy that doesn't do

any good. If it's worthless, it's bound to be wasteful. *Worry doesn't take the sorrow out of tomorrow; it takes the strength out of today. It's just pulling tomorrow's clouds over today's sunshine.*

### **3. Worry Is Wicked**

Not only is it worthless, and is it wasteful; it's wicked. In Matthew chapter 6, verse 32, Jesus said, *"After all these things do the Gentiles seek."* (Matthew 6:32) These are the things that pagans think about. Why, don't be like them! God watches over us.

So Paul here is getting ready now to tell us how to guard our thought life. But he's just setting the stage, and he's just giving us an atmosphere.

#### **D. Bring Every Need to God in Prayer**

Just find your joy in the Lord. Recognize that He's present with you. And refuse to worry about a single thing. You say, "Well, how do you do that?" Well, he goes on to tell us how to do that in verse 6: *"Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God."* (Philippians 4:6) Bring every need to God in prayer—every need!

##### **1. Pray About the Big Things**

Now surely we ought to pray about the big things. Do you have anything that you really think is a big problem? I want you to think about the biggest problem you can think of right now; I mean the absolute biggest. Have you got the biggest problem in your life right now? Have you got it in your mind? All right now, double it. Make it twice as big. Now, is it in your mind? Now I want to ask you a question: "Is that big to God?" See it in the light of God. The Lord says, *"I am the LORD...is there any thing too hard for me?"* (Jeremiah 32:27)

##### **2. Pray About the Little Things**

Well, surely then you can pray about the big things. What about the little things? You know, the danger is not that we fail to pray about the big things; the danger is that we fail to pray about the little things. He says, *"In every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God."* (Philippians 4:6)

#### **E. Develop a Thankful Spirit**

All right now, next: Not only bring every need to God—verse 6—but develop a thankful spirit. All of this is just getting you ready now to check these thoughts at the door, whether or not you're going to let them into your heart and into your mind—just a thankful spirit. Notice again: *"Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God."* (Philippians 4:6)

You know, sometimes we complain when we ought not to complain. I was sitting in

an automobile with a man. We were driving cross-country. And I had all of my children in private schools. Some were in college, and some were in Christian school. And, boy, Joyce and I were just paying out the money. And I was dying of *mal-tuition*. And I was complaining a little bit to this man, and I was talking to him about the great cost of sending a son to college. And he looked at me and said, “I’d give anything in the world if my son would go to college.” I thought, “Oh, what an ungrateful spirit I’d had! He had a son that was rebellious and a son that was a hellion and a maverick.”

You know, do you ever complain about dirty dishes? You know, there are lots of folks in Bangladesh who’d like to have some dirty dishes. Did you know that? I mean the dirty dishes are a sign that you’ve had something to eat. Listen: *“In every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.”*

Now all of that, he just sets the stage. He sets the stage now to tell you how to guard your thought life. Remember I said that’s kind of like going to the airport; and you have to pass through that security gate, and that security gate has a sensor on it. And there are certain things that are contraband. There are certain things that you are not to let through.

Now the Apostle Paul also gives us a checklist; and I want you to look at them right now in verse 8, and we’ll get right into the heart of the message: *“Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.”* (Philippians 4:8)

All right now, here are the tests as to whether or not you will admit anything into your mind.

## **I. The Reliance Test**

First of all is what I want to call the reliance test. We will let all these start with the letter *r*, so you can remember them. The reliance test—the reliance test: Is it true? Can you bank on it? Can you rely on it? *“Whatsoever things are true...”* (Philippians 4:8) Do you know that we live in a generation today that doesn’t ask, “Is it true?” We ask, “Does it work?” Don’t let anything come into your thought life and consciously dwell there. Don’t absorb it into your heart, into your philosophy. Don’t dwell on it; don’t let it be a part of your thought patterns if it is not true. And, of course, the Bible is the prime source of truth.

## **II. The Respect Test**

Now, secondly: Not only the reliance test, but the respect test. The second question is, “Is it honest?” *“Whatsoever things are true...”*; and then he says, *“whosoever things are*

*honest...*” (Philippians 4:8) Now the word *honest* here literally means “honorable”—things that are “honorable.” Do you let dishonorable things get into your mind? Are there things that are not worthy of your respect, things that are not worthy to really occupy your time? Some things are not bad because they are vile; they’re bad because they’re inane—just silly, stupid, and not worth it.

### III. The Rightness Test

All right, here’s the third thing: Not only the reliance test, and not only the respect test; but the rightness test. Look again here. He says, “*whatsoever things are just...*” (Philippians 4:8) And the word *just* here means “straight” as opposed to “crooked.” Don’t let any *crooked* thinking come into your mind. Do you think straight? Do you think on a straight line?

In my Bible study, in my preaching, and in my devotional life, I try to think in a straight line. I think many of us let things that are crooked come in. I mean, we don’t lay down a measuring rod by what we do. We just kind of go this way and that way a little bit. Now Paul says that there are certain things that are not going to get through the gate. Anything that is unreliable, disrespectful, or not right should not come through the gate. The rightness test: Is it right?

### IV. The Reverence Test

Now, here’s one. He mentions also, “*whatsoever things are pure...*” (Philippians 4:8) Now the word *pure* here means “free of contamination.” What it was used for is to ask, “Is this animal, or is this object, is it good enough and is it pure enough to be used in worship? That is, could it be offered to God?”

So the next test is what I call the reverence test: “*Whatsoever things are pure.*” That is, is this something that I would not be ashamed to offer to the Lord? Could I take this story; could I take this movie; could I take this friendship, and could I say, “Lord, I worship you with it”? “Well,” you say, “you’re not supposed to worship God with everything.” Oh, no, you are supposed to worship God with everything. The Bible says, “*Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.*” (1 Corinthians 10:31) Is this relationship a relationship I could say, “Lord, I offer it to you?”

Now last week I was in a Bible conference in Knoxville, Tennessee. And we had a chance to go up into the Smokies and see those gorgeous leaves. And I found myself—Joyce and I were there together—I found my life just overwhelmed with praise to God, and joy was coming up in my life. And I said, “Lord, this is such a beautiful experience; it’s just a time of worship. And I just offer this to you. I just offer it to you, just this good time. Just this joy, just this beauty, I offer it, Lord, to you. It is pure. It is worthy.”

Anything that you’re doing that cannot pass the reverence test—that is, that you

could not offer up to God—any relationship, any activity, any meal, any recreation, or any business deal, don't let it into your mind.

## V. The Relationship Test

And then, next of all, the relationship test. He says, “*whatsoever things are lovely...*” (Philippians 4:8) Now the word *lovely* here doesn't mean “beautiful.” But it literally means in the Greek language “causing you to love.” Does it cause you to love? If there's something that comes into your mind that causes you to criticize unjustly, or brings division between human beings, then it is wrong.

This word *lovely* is a combination of two words which actually mean “toward love”—“toward love.” Does this thought move you toward love? You say, does that mean I have to approve what other people do? Absolutely not! I watched television this afternoon. I got so perturbed with Sam Donaldson. Boy, but I love him. That's one of the great proofs I'm saved. I mean, does it move you to love? The relationship test.

## VI. The Refinement Test

And then, finally, the refinement test. Look, if you will here, as he goes on to say, “*whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report...*” (Philippians 4:8) Actually, this word means things that are “high-toned”—“high-toned.” That means that it sounds good. It is refined.

You know, I have people in every church I've ever pastored who are gossips. You know, I think gossip is a form of insanity—really! I'll tell you why I think it is a form of insanity. I've never met a gossip who knew they were a gossip. And this is what they say: “You know me: I don't gossip.” And then they start to gossip. Well, if a person's doing something, and they don't know they're doing it, I think they must have rooms to rent upstairs unfurnished. I mean, it's a form of insanity. They love to listen to things that are not of good report.

People use their ears for garbage cans. They say, “You know, I don't know why people always come and tell me these things.” I know why they tell you those things: they know you want to hear them. You know, they know that you will allow them to track mud on the carpet of your mind. They know that—if you're one who has all the latest news about everything. You know those kinds of folks? I mean, buddy, if it's bad, they've got it. I mean, it just comes to them. They say, “You know, well, I don't start all of these rumors; just the ones I tell them to, they're the ones who start them.” But the refinement test: these are things that you ought to put up at the gate of your mind, and do not allow them to come in.



## Conclusion

Now Paul is running out of time. He's already said, "Finally," like some preachers, but he doesn't mean immediately. Then he just kind of wraps it up and says, "*If there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.*" (Philippians 4:8) Folks, it is so simple, and it is so wonderful. You can absolutely take back that conquered ground, and you can say, "I'm only going to let these thoughts in my mind." And you don't have to think on anything you don't want to think on.

But now, listen. You must be thinking something. You cannot control your thought life by keeping your mind in neutral. You will think something. And if you're not thinking something right, you're going to think something wrong. If you're not thinking something good, you're going to think something bad.

And the way not to think bad thoughts is not by trying not to think bad thoughts. Try not to think of a submarine right now. Are you sure you're not thinking about a submarine right now? All right, the only way not to think about a submarine is not by trying not to think about a submarine but by thinking about something else. People who are trying not to think about a submarine are thinking about the submarines they're trying not to think about, isn't that right? Sure!

You see, the Bible says, "*Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.*" (Romans 12:21) Just let these thoughts come into your mind. And just keep your heart and mind stayed upon Him. "*Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee.*" (Isaiah 26:3) "*We have the mind of Christ.*" (1 Corinthians 2:16) Learn to think God's thoughts after Him. And use Paul's standard here in Philippians 4 as the grid through which everything must come before it finds lodging in your mind.