

Just Thinking

If ever a man had cause to feel hopelessly agitated or depressed, it was Paul. When a man is on death row, he can at least brace himself for what lies ahead, but from his Roman imprisonment, the Apostle had no way of knowing whether the imperial caprice would lean towards his life or death. Still, Paul's emotions remained stable. He had learned long ago to draw on the spiritual resources that were his by virtue of his standing in Christ.

It is the nature of the human mind to obsess on wearisome things even when our circumstances are nowhere near as dire as Paul's. We cannot control what crosses our minds, but we do have some say as to what settles there. Because our fallen natures are sinful, our minds tend to settle on spiritually fruitless things like fleshly or idolatrous passions. We can dwell on negative feelings about other people. We can fixate on settling a score. All of these things may seem exhilarating in the short-run, but they contribute little to our inner peace.

When Paul's friends in Philippi were enduring a few emotional ups and downs, he sent them this counsel:

... ⁸Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything be excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things. –
Philippians 4:8

God's promises are **“TRUE.”** Many of the things that agitate us most are either imaginary, never happened or involve matters we cannot control anyway. The coveted quick fixes to our discontent are unreliable. No inspirational book or CD quite does the trick. Dwell on the promises of God that are always true.

“NOBLE” things are things worthy of honor. Shallow minds are drawn to the cheap and frivolous. These days, depth is resented and avoided in a culture enamored with sound-bytes and instant gratification. God's people must be willing to grow deeper - in their faith, in doctrine, in their relationships and in their personal spiritual disciplines.

“RIGHT” conveys a sense of duty. Nothing drains one's spiritual juices faster than preoccupation with personal spiritual entitlements – **MY** needs, **MY** preferences. We must look for others to serve in Jesus' Name. We must dwell on our duty to Him and to others. Emptying ourselves is a remarkably effective way of finding our own emptiness filled.

This is a jaded world. Our minds do not simply gravitate to **“PURE”** thoughts. It is one thing to say, "Watch what you expose your minds to." Paul calls us to seek out things that are wholesome - so that our thoughts and our amusements will not embarrass us in the presence of God.

Jesus does command your brothers to love you, but do you have to make it a challenge for them? Pursue the **“LOVELY”** virtues that render likable people likable. Become the kind of person that is easy to love. Jesus finds us and rescues us as we are. Nowhere are we encouraged to remain as we are.

The word rendered “**ADMIRABLE**” literally means "fair-speaking." Among the Greeks, however, the word came to refer to a period of holy silence before a sacrifice was rendered to one of their gods. Paul may have had in mind reflection on the things that are fit for God to hear. There's much rough language in this world. How can we express ourselves in such a way that is admirable to men and to God – that is at the same time, holy as well as winsome and charming? Must we be coarse as the world is coarse to get our point across?

“**EXCELLENT**” describes how every Christian ought to serve the Lord, but everything a Christian does, he should do as though he is serving. Therefore, excellence also describes how a Christian should conduct himself in his occupation and how he should attend to his other responsibilities in the world. The pursuit of excellence shapes a believer's witness in the world.

Think on what is “**PRAISEWORTHY**”. We are not to pursue the praise of men *per se*, but lives of virtue are generally admired. We should set our minds on things that are commendable to others and we should strive to live in a way that we are commendable and attractive to others.

Only one life was ever marked by perfection. We want to be like Jesus, but we are distressed at times by just how unlike Him we really are. Perhaps, were we to give our minds to the pursuit of that which is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent and praiseworthy, we might start to look, sound and feel more like the saints we long to be.

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