

**UNBROKEN JOY  
THINKING AND DOING  
Philippians 4:8-9**

*Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.*

Many years ago I had the opportunity on occasion to go to North Carolina, into the mountains, and we vacationed there a little bit. On occasion, I would go alone and do a study retreat. There was a location there in the mountains where a man owned a lot of property. He had these little cabins there and he would invite ministry leaders to go there and to just spend some time getting renewed there in the mountains. I would hike on occasion while I was there, and there was an elderly gentleman who was a guide on these trails. His name was Carlton and he had spent his lifetime walking these trails. It was just the two of us on occasion, so it was a matter of time before the subject of spiritual things came up. On this one occasion, Carlton told me that he didn't really have any interest in going to heaven. The reason was that the Christians that he had met, he didn't really want to spend eternity with, and that the people he really wanted to be with weren't going to be there.

I wasn't entirely sure where Carlton was coming from and I don't remember exactly what I said, but Carlton had told me specifically about his brothers, some of them having already passed on. So I said, "Well you know, Jesus told the story about a rich man who died, and that when he found himself in hell he begged for the opportunity to go back and warn his brothers." I said something to the effect of, "You know, if you have family members who are not in heaven, they would probably tell you to rethink your position."

Well, as time went on, I found out more. The place where I was staying - I never thought about the fact that I was always alone. There were all these cabins. It was a retreat center, and I always stayed alone. One day, I encountered some of the people that were typically staying there. These Christians had a specific view of how to live in the world, so the ladies, even when hiking, would

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wear dresses. And the dresses were very modest, very long. They wore head coverings. And there was a very undeniable attitude of rebellion against the things of the world, a rejection of the culture. To their credit, they were very bold in sharing the gospel with Carlton when they met him, but they were so harsh that he found it completely unrelatable.

That's one extreme. There is another extreme that is characterized by certain churches, which have modeled an attitude of really embracing the things of the world. Their musical time is like a concert, and there are fog machines. These are specific examples here in South Florida: Pulpits that rise up out of the ground (that's kind of cool, isn't it? We might try that), a pastor who comes into the service on a zip line, a pastor who did a reality thing of 24 hours being on-line with his family so that could you observe, (you do not want to observe my family for 24 hours, live, unfiltered), cars being driven out on the stage, cheerleaders...all kinds of things. It's an opposite extreme, right? One is: Culture is completely bad. Another is: Embracing every part of culture that can be embraced.

Now, I would say to us that there are things that are commendable in both of those extremes, and then I would suggest that there are dangers to be avoided in both, and that those are not our only two options. This passage addresses the specific question: As Christians, how do we relate to other people? How do we relate to other Christians? How do we relate to the culture? How do we relate to the world? Now, that's a big, big question, and this passage, believe it or not -- it may not look like it at first glance -- it addresses this whole idea. We looked last week at this idea of not being anxious and praying. The scripture tells us, "Be anxious about nothing. Don't be full of care and all worked up. Instead, pray about everything."

But if you remember last week's teaching, you will remember that it's not just so that we can be anxiety free, although that's pretty wonderful, right? Right? It's more than that. It's about communing with God. It's about walking with God and experiencing the presence of God so that the kingdom of God is manifesting around us. I know that sounds maybe spooky or super spiritual, but God wants us to pray for his kingdom to come.

I used the lengthy, I think, inspiring story of Corrie ten Boom's life to illustrate that. Here is a woman who never married, but she gave her life in serving others before World War II. Then when World War II hit, here is this single woman, 50 years old, who poured out her life in kingdom living.

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She just prayed her way through crisis and risk and harm and danger and death, living this glorious life of seeing the kingdom come, experiencing the presence of God.

Today's passage carries that promise of the peace of God. It ends with that and it elaborates for us this whole idea of how we experience the kingdom. I am framing it with this question: "How do we relate to everything else?" This is going to sound a little formulaic, and I apologize because it can't be reduced to a formula, but I think it's a good way to begin. I think it's a good way to give us some hooks to hang some things on. So here it is. Here's today's message. If you are going to zone out or fall asleep, just pay attention for 30 more seconds and the rest will be just pastoral embellishment.

1. Embrace what is good.
2. Challenge what is bad.
3. Live the life of the cross.

That's a model. That's a paradigm for how to relate, how to relate to Christians who dress completely different, who wear long, modest dresses when doing recreation, to Christians who are having concerts on Sunday morning that look more like entertainment, perhaps, to some than worship. That's a model for how to relate to people who have never heard about Jesus, people of different faiths, people in all places of life.

Paul gives it to us in two categories:

- I. Thinking, and
- II. Doing.

Let's start with thinking.

- I. Thinking. Just a general observation here to begin with, very radical:
  1. Thinking is important. You can quote me on that. I was reading the New York Times and there was this article. The headline caught my attention: "Death Rates Rising for Middle Aged White Americans." Wait a minute, that's me! White Americans, age 45 to 54, are dying at an accelerated rate. In fact, in the last 15 years, 134 deaths per 100,000

greater than what was happening 15 years ago. Did I lose you with that statistic? That's a lot. 134 people out of a group of 100,000 more than were dying 15 years ago.

That's crazy! That's not at all what we expect, especially in that part of the population. Two economists, very brilliant people who happen to be husband and wife, discovered this. It was right there in the facts all along, in the data, but it was constantly missed because it was so contrary to what would be expected. When they researched and dug it out, they found out that in fact, it wasn't just white Americans, it was a specific group of white middle aged Americans. It was a specific group with a high school education or less. As they did more studies, they found out that that group was not keeping up with inflation, that unemployment was increasing, and that they were making less than they were making 15 years ago. So there is this huge economic factor.

And the cause of death, the increased cause of death, was suicide, drug addiction in general, prescription drug abuse, and alcohol abuse. I would put it all under the category of self-abuse, self-harm, and it all traces back to thinking. Because of expectations, because of the world we live in, though maybe the majority of these individuals were not missing a meal, their interpretation of the circumstances of life was one where they lost the battle of the mind and gave in to destructive behavior. Thinking matters.

Paul tells us in this passage, "...Think about these things." He is telling you to tell yourself what to think, to control your mind. There are other passages, obviously in scripture, which give us similar ideas about bringing our thoughts into captivity under the obedience of Christ. Thinking is important.

2. The second idea here under this major category of thinking is: Affirm or embrace what is good around you. Embrace what is good around you. Now, this is interesting, because when you are reading through Philippians, if you are, for example, an experienced bible reader, studier of God's word, if you have a lot of experience being in the word of God, then when you get to verse 8, it sounds different. It's not what you normally hear in God's word. I know the idea of thinking is not unusual, but Paul gives a list of six virtues. Did you notice that? Whatever is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, and commendable - This is not a typical list. In fact, every bible scholar I could find

agreed that Paul has imported a list from Greek philosophy, a popular, moral list of virtues, and he has just taken it right out of the world and brought it into his letter in Philippi.

Now, he's careful. It's his own list. He is picking and choosing, and he certainly intends to give it a biblical flavor, but it's surprising. I think it's modeling for us that there are things going on around us in the world that are commendable, that are good, that are right, and that we should embrace those things. P.T. O'Brien, for example, writes: "On balance then, it's best to conclude that the apostle has taken over terms that were current coin in popular moral philosophy, especially in stoicism, a brand of Greek philosophy, Greek moralism. He wants his Philippians friends to develop these qualities." Alright, so we embrace what is good around us.

3. The third point under the category of thinking: Practice discernment. Be discriminating. Practice discernment by challenging what is not good. After the Apostle Paul gives us this list, this list of six virtues, he gives us two qualifying, summarizing statements: "if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise." These are two summarizing clauses. We are not just to take everything in, but some things are worthy of praise. Some things are excellent. That word for excellence speaks of virtue or morality, that which is morally good. It doesn't mean just that which is the reflection of good ability or gifting. It's morally preferable, excellent, virtuous. We are to be discriminating. We can hear an artist who is a musician, a rapper (since we laughed about this earlier) and we can say there are certain things here that are commendable, but there are other things here that we want to challenge, and this is given to us under the heading of "Thinking."

Now, here are three doctrines to help you do this; three biblical doctrines that really help me a lot, and I believe they will help you. Three truths in scripture that will help you to embrace the good, challenge the bad.

1. Creation. We are made in the image of God, and that which is material is not inherently evil. So we do not have a pessimistic attitude toward creation in general, because God made it, and we see other people, all people, healthy people, sick people, moral people, immoral people, made in the image of God.

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Some of you remember from the parenting teenage course that I told about meeting with a couple from another church, actually another country. The father was saying to me, "Brian, you are telling me that I need to affirm my child, my daughter, and I am having trouble doing that, because really, I don't see anything that is worthy of affirmation. Could you help me, because she is just living a bad life?" I said, "Well, brother, she is made in the image of God. And if you are not seeing the beauty of God's image in her life, then that's pointing back to you as a starting point, because that respect, that understanding of the dignity of that which is human is special and is the crowning achievement of God's creation." That's important for us in terms of the lens through which we perceive everyone. The first doctrine is the doctrine of creation.

2. The second one is the doctrine of sin. The scripture teaches us that no creation is good. It is messed up because of sin, because we have a relational problem with God. We have rebelled against him. Sickness and disease and death and twistedness and brokenness and decay characterize all that is human and all that is created. That helps us to live in this tension of embracing the good, challenging the bad. Romans 3:23: "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."
3. The third doctrine that helps us is the doctrine of common grace. Common grace. Let me give a quick explanation. It's kind of important. If you are here and you are not a Christian, hopefully this will give you some area of application. Scripture tells us that there is special grace and common grace. The special grace brings us into a relationship with Jesus Christ. God helps us. God gives us grace, God's favor, where through faith in Jesus Christ we receive the forgiveness of our sin and enter into a relationship with God the Father. It's a gift. It's grace. God gives it. We don't deserve it. We don't earn it.

We now put all three doctrines together: We are made by God, we are made in his image and we will answer to God for who we are and all that we do. Our sin has broken our relationship with him. We are in trouble with God, and the only way for it to be fixed is grace, to receive the gift of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ - special grace.

But there's a common grace. There is a grace of God, which is common to everyone, where God helps everyone, where God blesses everyone, where he gives everyone what we don't deserve. Matthew 5:43-45, listen as I read:

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You have heard that it was said (this is Jesus speaking), “You shall love you neighbor and hate your enemy.” But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

So thank God. Aren't you glad that God's sun shines on the evil as well as the good? Because there would be some days I would be living in the dark. Right? God doesn't say (and this is important for our worldview) he doesn't say, “Just because you are a Christian, I am going to make life easier, or you are going to be more gifted.” Right? Tom Brady, who may not be a Christian, is a better quarterback than Tim Tebow, who is obviously a Christian. And if I'm the owner of a team, I'm going with Brady. I will pray with Tim Tebow, but on the field... Right? Some of you are not sure, because you don't understand common grace. Right?

You know, we have joked about this before. When you get a plumber, you want a good plumber. A Christian can pray for your pipes, a plumber can fix them. Hopefully, a Christian will be honest, and hopefully there will be an excellence about his work, but God does not distribute his gifts just to favor those who are Christians.

That brings us to just announce that Bruno Mars is going to sing at one of the upcoming Superbowls. I don't know a lot about Bruno Mars, but I saw him in a past Superbowl, and my impressions were: 1. Wow, he's shorter than I thought. 2. He is amazingly talented. I mean, just to do that live before 100,000 people like that. I was impressed. 3. I don't think her sex takes you to paradise. I thought that song alone was an interesting commentary on how in our culture we elevate sex to the ultimate, and there is a value for us to challenge. Created wonderful, in the image of God, wonderfully to be celebrated, a place for it to be morally practiced, but in today's society to be challenged in the way that it is exalted as the end all to end all. That's all under thinking. Let's look at doing.

II. Doing. Verse 9. This is an important aspect, because it informs everything we have just said. Thinking - verse 8. Doing - verse 9. “What you have learned, what you have received, what you have heard, and what you have seen in me - practice these things and the God of peace will be with you.” Whenever Paul tells you to follow him, he is thinking we should follow him because he is following Christ. He says as much in 1 Corinthians 11:1, where he says, “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.” Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ. And when you read verse 9 of Philippians 4, he

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doesn't tell you exactly what his example is. What you have learned, what you have received, what you have heard, what you have seen in me...he expects them to know it. And if you have been with us in the study of Philippians, he has made it clear. He has talked a lot - two whole chapters really - about example, following the right example. In Chapter 2, he holds up the example of Jesus. He says, "Jesus went to the cross so that you could be saved."

Jesus, the son of God, preexistent, eternal - grasp this! Jesus Christ, the son of God, living in glory, left all of that to enter into humanity, to enter in to the creation that he created, to live in poverty, to live for you, to live a perfect life in your place, to die for you. You have a messiah who is a crucified savior, so that the penalty of your sin could be paid. Receive today the forgiveness of sin in Jesus Christ. There is no other way to be right with God, to be ready for eternity. Humble yourself before God and say, "I have sinned against you. You are my Maker, and you, in your love, have provided a way for me to now get right." That is grace. But Paul radically does something beyond that. He says, "Not only do you receive this salvation, you follow the example of Jesus and you live the cross life."

I believe that this verse is tremendously important in terms of how we relate to the world. It's not enough just to say we can embrace and affirm certain things while we must challenge others, but the way we do it is we lay down our lives, following the example of Jesus. Going back to Philippians 2, Paul (listen very carefully) gives this poetic, inspirational example of Jesus. And then he shows how he himself follows that model; Timothy followed that model, and Epaphroditus. He spends the whole chapter building this idea of follow examples of people who lay down their lives to live for others. So that you come to a worship service on a Sunday morning, and we spend 10 to 15 minutes in the middle of the service praying for orphans, because that's the call of God on the church - to be father to the fatherless. It's why we have people who are fostering stand up, and we pray for them, because this is the mission of the church. You may not be called specifically to do that, to open your home, but you are called to that mission - to support others, to be a part of it. Amen, Brian. Thank you. Please preach this. Please challenge us.

The cross life. Paul gives us this dramatic example. If we took the time to go back through Chapter 3, he tells us his whole story. He tells us how he was a rabbi. He was in a place in Judaism of being the smartest of the smartest, the most zealous; how he persecuted the church in the name of God, and how one day he met Jesus, this crucified Lord, and it changed his life. He left it all. He left everything to follow Jesus and to follow that model of the life of the cross. And he tells us, "Get in

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line and follow me... that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death..." -- Philippians 3:10. Philippians 3:17 -- "Brothers, join in imitating me..."

Do you see this theme of "following my example in taking up your cross"? Listen carefully to Philippians 3:17-18: "Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ." Now, coming to the end of Philippians, we see something very clear, that the Philippians are experiencing rejection from their culture. They are experiencing persecution. Their values are not being readily embraced, and we see now a model for living a life of joy as we embrace what is good, challenge what is bad, laying down our lives for the benefit of others. It's powerful.

This week the boat show is going on here in Fort Lauderdale. I don't own a boat. I don't want a boat. But this is a big part of our economy and I had a chance to hear a guy who has an exhibit at the boat show. He is a yacht broker. He will probably get no business from me personally, but he is a pretty interesting guy. His name is Bob Dennison. He is a Christian here in South Florida, and he has 15 locations nationally where he sells yachts. His grandfather was a yacht builder. He told how God began to move on his heart as a Christian to open his home in Rio Vista to the homeless. So he went down to the Broward Bridge, to the homeless under the bridge, and he brought them into his expensive home in Rio Vista. He said over the past few years he has taken in 65 people. Some of them have been restored to being self-sufficient. Others have died. Many addicts. He told a story about bringing a guy to his house. He was trying to sell this guy a yacht, and there was this huge guy walking around in his shorts in his living room - a six foot seven homeless individual. He called him by name. He repeatedly said, "These are my friends." He let someone stay in his home and they found a crack pipe stuck under a couch. He tried to explain, "Well, that's not really mine." He was living a life of tension between the ultra-rich and the least of these. He told about the challenges, the successes, the failures. Now that he has a child, he is not able to do that in the same way.

I mention this individual because he goes on to say how he was speaking to a group of largely successful leaders in South Florida, and that he had an Apple watch that he didn't wear that day because he didn't think it really reflected well on the message. He used it to kind of humorously

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point out the tension that he felt with “Do I really need an Apple watch? I can justify it. I bought it. But what could I have done with that money to help other people?” He was just saying, “You know, listen - I live with the ultra-rich. I have lived with the homeless. I deal with this question all the time. I don’t have it figured out.” But he is wrestling. Do you see how he is wrestling with “What can I embrace? What do I challenge without trying to live a life where I am constantly condemned for the blessing of God?”

I recommended these two books: “Radical”, by David Platt, and “Crazy Love”, by Francis Chan. They are basically carrying the same message. I have been interested by the various responses that I hear from people as they are reading. Some people are excited about it. Some people are not so excited. But some people are saying, “You know, I read this and just feel condemned.” It’s interesting. I would tell you, the books aren’t perfect and the whole goal is not to make you feel condemned, but that you and I need to be challenged in this area. We need it.

Amen, Brian. Thank you. Thank you. It’s just courageous of you to bring that message. Thank you. Thank you for pastoring us in this way. I know I have made it difficult on you, but thank you. I’ll just encourage myself. The goal is not to make you feel guilty. The goal is to inspire you with a life of living for the kingdom, the promise of God’s presence. Let me just give you a couple of applications as we finish up. When we bought this building, by the grace of God we experienced a great relationship with City Hall. I have had the opportunity to develop friendships with the city attorney, the mayor, various mayors, commission members, the city manager, various city managers. We want to be a blessing to the city of North Lauderdale. It’s a part of our vision. We want South Florida to flourish because Christians are laying down their lives in the name of Jesus Christ to bring God’s blessing. And I have to be honest, it’s a model where most frequently I hear Christians talk about how bad the government is, how bad the city is, how bad this is, how there is too much traffic and too much this, and too much that.

One way to apply this sermon is just be grateful. Be positive. Be city-friendly, where you speak well of the people around you. Again, we have here a simple model that we are just trying to lay out as a beginning place. If we go live in New York City and we hate New York City, we are not going to be very effective missionaries, are we? This is a great place! I mean, no offense if you are from Nebraska, but I would die in Nebraska. There is a reason you don’t have traffic jams in Nebraska. Let’s be positive. Speak well. Work for the flourishing of others. Renounce this whole

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idea of: What's in it for me? And embrace the cross of Jesus Christ. And the promise for you is the presence of God and the peace of God, experiencing the kingdom of God coming.

In conclusion, when I was in seminary a lady approached me at church one day. She said, "Brian, I have an elderly mom who is a shut-in and you are a seminary student. Would you be willing to come by and visit her and befriend her?" I said, "Wow, when you ask it like that, you remind me that I'm a seminary student, and I'm going into ministry, I can't very well say no, can I?" So I went. Her name was Ella Mae Bradford. She was a very elderly lady, sweet, dear woman. I visited with her a number of times and she told me this one story many times. She said, "Brian, when I was a child, I was confused by the different religions and the different denominations, and I was unsure of exactly what I should do." Then she shared about an experience she had where in essence the Lord showed her a picture of the cross and told her, "Follow the cross."

And that's the message. Embrace the work of Jesus Christ on the cross that you might be forgiven of sin, and follow him and the example that he has set for us by saving us. Amen.