

What's On Your Mind?

Philippians 4:8-9

Extravagant Grace, Part 4

According to the editors of the *Concise Oxford Dictionary*, the most frequently used noun in the English language is the word, time.

People, one article reads, just can't thinking about time. And the leading issue is how to do more, accomplish more, resolve more things – without spending as much time.

Just survey the titles of self-help books and you get an idea: *One Year to a College Degree, Thirty Days to a Better Life, Seven Days to a Brand New Me*. If that isn't quick enough to address your crisis, these editors wrote, how about purchasing books with these titles: *One-Minute Father, Sixty-Second Stress Management, The One-Minute Healing Experience, One-Minute Therapist*, or *Sixty Seconds to Serenity?*

More than one hundred titles in print use the word instant. You can find everything from *Instant Yiddish to Instant Emotional Healing*. And if you're still running out of time, read *Instant Time Management*.

The Christian publishing world is not immune to the band of time. You can purchase your own copies of *Sixty Seconds with God, Daily Prayers Sixty Seconds Long*, and *Instant Sermons for Busy Pastors*.ⁱ

I need to get that one.

The great hymn of the faith entitled, *Take Time to Be Holy*, would be retitled by our generation today, with *How to Get Holy in a Hurry*.

But the truth is, you can't. And you never will,

Being transformed by the renewing of our minds isn't a 60 second pursuit . . . it's a life time of priority.

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Roman believers that they needed to surrender not just their bodies but to be transformed by having their minds renewed (Romans 12:1-2).

In other words, they now had the potential to think entirely differently than they ever could as unbelievers.

Apart from Jesus Christ, the New Testament describes the believer's mind as:

- evil (1 Timothy 6:5)
- focused on the body (Romans 8:5)
- hostile toward God (Colossians 1:21)
- hardened to spiritual truth (2 Corinthians 3:14)
- undiscerning of spiritual reality (1 Corinthians 2:14)
- blinded by Satan (2 Corinthians 4:4)
- consumed with vain pursuits (Ephesians 4:17)
- and utterly defiled (Titus 1:15).ⁱⁱ

To the mind of Paul – and through Him the Holy Spirit – the remarkable distinction between you and the unbeliever you work next to, or study next to, or sit on the bus next to, or live next to – the distinction isn't just how you act – but how you think.

Solomon gets to the core issue when he writes, *as a man thinks in his heart, so is he (Proverbs 23:7)*.

In other words, the reason your unbelieving neighbor or co-worker or fellow student acts the way he does is because he thinks the way he does.

As one author put it – you are not what you think you are; but what you think – you are.ⁱⁱⁱ

Would you like me to say that again? Ok, I'll say it anyway. You are not what you think you are; but what you think – you are. So one of the most profound questions you can ask someone else in the faith, is this, “What’s on your mind?”
What’s on your mind?

Whatever is on your mind is synonymous with whatever is already on your heart; and whatever is already on your heart and mind is eventually going to show up all over your hands and your feet and your life.

The Jews used to get up every morning and pray the great Shema – the prayer from **Deuteronomy chapter 6** – one of our own Pastor Tom Zempel’s favorite verses of scripture, by the way, as we remembered and honored his legacy yesterday at his memorial; the prayer goes like this, “**And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.**”^v

What’s fascinating is that Jesus Christ quoted that same text but added to it His own divine revelation – when He quoted it to his audience He no doubt startled them by adding the words – You shall love the Lord your God . . . **with all your mind (Mark 12:30).**

Listen, when you became a Christian, you didn’t lose your mind; you didn’t stop using your mind – you actually began using it as God intended when He created you.

You didn’t slip into mental neutral, you finally put your brain into gear.

Now since the discipline of having your mind renewed is so critical to the growth of the believer, you might wonder – are there any guidelines for what we allow to occupy our minds?

Paul answers that question in his letter to the Philippian believers – so, turn to your copy of **Philippians – at chapter 4 and verse 8.**

Paul is going to give us six adjectives and two nouns to govern our thought patterns. Paul begins a new paragraph by writing, “**Finally, brethren.**”

Stop – When Paul writes **Finally, brethren**, that doesn’t mean he’s finishing his letter, any more than pastors are finishing their sermons when they say finally. It might give you a little hope, but it’s not over yet.

What Paul means here is that he is coming to the end of his list of imperatives in this context.^v

Paul has been firing commands one after another in this section of his letter – like, **verse 4, Rejoice in**

the Lord always and again I say, rejoice (exclamation point) – **verse 6, Be anxious for nothing . . .**

And Paul will end this list of 8 guidelines by giving us another imperative – another exclamation point – at the end of **verse 8** – commanding us to **dwell on these things.**

We need to understand that these commands are not suggestions to apply to our lives accidentally; periodically, but intentionally.

These are not electives in the curriculum of holiness – they are assigned classes with daily assignments.

And they don’t last for 60 seconds either – but hour upon every waking hour.

Now, to the list.

Finally, brethren, whatever is true.

1. Whatever is true.

This first guideline runs absolutely counterculture to the popular guidelines of the day.

People no longer ask today, “Is it true?” but “Does it work?” “How will it make me feel?” “Do other people agree?” This kind of pragmatism has successfully worked its way into the church where the average church is more concerned about whether something will be divisive or offensive than whether or not it is biblically true.^{vi}

Whatever is true can also by contrast refer to that which is not true. Lies and rumors and exaggerations are not true; deceitful thoughts and plans that run through your mind are out of bounds because they are not true.

What’s true is that which is faithful, reliable, real and genuine.^{vii}

What’s on your mind – first and foremost – needs to those things that are true.

2. Secondly, Paul adds, whatever is honorable

Your translation may read, *whatever is noble.*

This same word is translated, **dignified** where Paul in the Book of Titus, uses this descriptive word to call the men in the churches on the island of Crete to dignified maturity.

To leave adolescence behind and become men of noble maturity and dignity. Now that doesn't mean you can't laugh or have fun.

One linguist clarifies that that this kind of noble mind simply dreads anything that is superficial or flippant.^{viii}

The noble or honorable mind isn't occupied with superficial or trivial thoughts.

It's interesting that this word was used classically by the Greeks to refer originally to anything related to their gods and the temples of their gods. The Apostle Paul uses the word to correctly refer to the believer who moves through his world as the very temple of the living God.^{ix}

Can we be any more honored than that? No wonder we should think and act honorably in light of Who we carry around in the temple of our bodies (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

3. Paul adds, thirdly, *whatever is right*

Whatever is right or just. Paul is telling the Philippian believers and us as well that what out to be on our minds are plans and thoughts and dreams that make for just living – right living – in other words, we are thinking of ways to do the right thing.^x

By contrast, the evil man lies upon his bed at night thinking up new ways to sin – new ways to cheat – new ways to steal (Psalm 36:4).

This mental pattern or guidelines relates to integrity – in other words, you're gonna do what's right in the way you do your homework or write that contract or dry the dishes. You're going to do it all the right way.

The news reported some time ago that 31 students at a University were caught submitting essays they plagiarized from the Internet. Unfortunately, this isn't all that unusual these days and teachers and professors are alert to the problem. But what this discovery a little more interesting was the fact that these students were writing essays on the subject of ethics. They cheated in order to pass the class on ethics! That's like stealing a Bible so you can memorize scripture.

Now even the world intuitively knows what is right (Romans 2). And even though they discard the Bible, they'll be quick to say, "Hey, that's not right" whenever they are personally affected.

Doing what's right is something we admire – and we admire it all the more because it seems to be losing ground.

In the business world especially, we admire this quality of integrity.

I came across this historical anecdote recently about a Mr. Leon Bean who, in 1912, began a mail order business in his home state of Maine. At first, all he sold was hunting boots with the unusual promise of a money back guarantee. However, defects in the design of his boots led to 90% of them being returned along with the request to return the money.

Making good on that guarantee might have ruined his young, growing business, but Leon Bean kept his word, sent back their money, corrected the design, and sold the newly improved hunting boots with the same money back guarantee. Today, L.L. Bean is one of the largest mail-order companies in the United States.^{xi}

So what's on your mind? Think about what's right. And when you think about the right things, you are on your way to doing the right things.

4. Paul goes on to add to the list – *whatever is pure*

The word Paul uses refers to those things that are morally blameless.

This is a favorite characteristic of Paul for the believer:

- He writes to Timothy, *Keep yourself pure (1 Timothy 5:22)*
- Titus urges the younger women in the church to be *self-controlled and pure (Titus 2:5)*
- James describes the wisdom from God as being, first and foremost, *pure (James 3:17)*
- Peter encourages the wives of unbelievers to live with their husbands with *reverence and purity (1 Peter 3:2)*
- John writes that those who have confidence in the coming of Christ should purify their lives in light of His coming (*1 John 3:3*)

For the Apostle's, purity in all of life begins in the thought life; and listen, because of that spiritual reality, the greatest battle on the planet isn't between warring nations; it isn't between political ideologies.

The greatest conflict – Dwight Pentecost wrote decades ago – isn't political, economic, or social. The greatest conflict taking place in the world today is the battle that takes place in your mind.^{xii}

No wonder God's words warns us over and over again – guard your mind . . . guard your eyes . . . guard your thoughts . . . guard your heart - Solomon wrote, *for out of it are the issues of life – and, you could add, death (Proverbs 4:23)*.

What's on your mind? Is it pure? Your culture is no friend to purity, is it?

In 1896, a film called *The Kiss* outraged society because an unmarried couple was filmed stealing a quick kiss. Critics called it absolutely disgusting . . . one critic said it should call for police action.

If you are old enough to remember the advent of television in every living room – back in the 60's and 70's, shows like *Dick Van Dyke*, required that whenever they were in the bedroom, they had to be shown sleeping in separate beds. And they were married.

One analysis showed that by the 1990s, prime-time entertainment, including movies, offered openly sexual remarks or behavior every four minutes – in fact, estimates reveal that the average viewer witnesses through television and movies, 14,000 sexually loaded scenes every year. Nearly all of them involve unmarried people.

One analysis I came across in my research, wrote that there are rarely any consequences. No character in the movie has their life ruined because of it; no one gets AIDS or herpes. No one gets pregnant either. No one has to change diapers, get up in the middle of the night, or struggle for years to raise a fatherless child.^{xiii}

And just consider the education through media – when you throw in TV, movies, social media, Youtube; one report I came across wrote that the average child in America, between their kindergarten and high school graduation, watches on average 15,000 hours of television and movies – and, get this, that same child spends less than 13,000 hours in school.^{xiv}

What an education. Television is that strange invention that entertains you in your living room with people you would never allow inside your house.^{xv}

And now the real problem with purity of thought – for men and women of all ages – has exploded with smart phones and the internet.

I have talked to 3rd grade teachers who've said one of their greatest challenges is the fact that boys are watching pornography on their smart phones – in the 3rd grade.

And for the believer, of any age – living, by the way, not in a world that allows pornography or sells pornography – listen, we happen to be living in a world that *is* pornographic.

It sells everything. There just isn't any boundary anymore. But the truth remains . . . and there are still no excuses for the believer who wants to develop through the discipline of the mind, the character and holiness and purity, which is nothing less than the mind of Christ.

Even though the battle is now out in the open, the truth remains the same – as Charles Spurgeon put it 140 years ago – God will not dwell in the parlor of our hearts when we choose to entertain the devil in the cellar of our thoughts.^{xvi}

So what's on your mind? That happens to be your greatest battle today.

Peter wrote to the believers and reminded them to be alert – literally, stay awake – for the devil – that old serpent – is also *like a roaring lion, roaming about seeking someone to devour (I Peter 5:8)*.

That verb *to devour* literally means discredit . . . he wants the *believer* to discredit – the unbeliever isn't really appetizing to him . . . he's after the precious life, Solomon wrote.

He can't have your soul, but he can destroy the testimony of your life and the integrity of your heart and the serenity of your conscience. He's a lion – roaring – hungry.

You don't flirt with a hungry lion. You don't get near a hungry lion; you don't walk up to him and pat him on the head and say, "Nice kitty . . . nice kitty cat . . . there's no such thing as a nice kitty cat – especially one that big."

Satan is also referred to as a serpent. And you don't get near a dangerous snake either, do you? You stay out of their way.

I was driving home a few months ago and a snake was slithering across the street in my neighborhood. It wasn't dark or grey, but rust/brown. I didn't think twice – I swerved over in my pickup truck and ran over it.

I didn't slow down so it could get away; I didn't stop and go talk to it . . . I ran over it. Don't tell PETA . . . they prefer snakes to people like me.

Listen, you don't negotiate with a lion . . . you don't play around with a snake . . . you don't slow down and talk to sin . . . it has the ability to poison you and devour you and bring terrible destruction to all that God is making of your life.

So what's on your mind? Make sure it's pure.

5. Paul goes on to add, *whatever is lovely*

This adjective appears only here in the New Testament. James Moffat translated it in 1913 as winsome.

It can be understood as those thoughts that are pleasing, agreeable, lovely.^{xvii}

One translator paraphrased it as that which produces love; in other words, don't think on those things that produces bitterness or fear or resentment or criticism.^{xviii}

Paul is also encouraging us to think on all that is both morally and mentally and emotionally lovely, but that which is aesthetically lovely.

Let your mind think about all that is beautiful in creation; all that is beautiful and amazing and majestic and glorious and awe inspiring in the handiwork of God around you.

Even our Lord challenged his audience to think about the birds and the field grass and the blooming flowers – to think about them and observe them and then draw analogies from them regarding the beauty of God's extravagant grace in your own life.

Take time to observe nature . . . take time to think about the beauty in that sunset or the crashing waves of the ocean; let your mind be immersed in the beauty of some symphony or the marvel of some scientific discovery.

What's on your mind? Go outside for a change and consider the natural world and starry heavens above – David wrote, they declare the glory of God – day and night.

6. Paul adds next, *whatever is of good repute*.

In other words, whatever is worth repeating . . . whatever is commendable to others.

Paul is effectively telling us not to let our minds become captive to things that we really shouldn't be

repeating to anybody else. Don't dwell on anything that isn't worth repeating.

And now Paul adds two conditional sentences. Notice he writes at the end of *verse 8, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.*

By the way, these conditional sentences can be understood this way – If there is any excellence and if there are things worthy of praise and there are . . . and there are . . . so here's the command – the imperative . . . start occupying your mind with these things.

Let's turn this verse around for some additional clarity and effect – Paul is virtually saying this as well – “Finally, brethren, whatever is not true, whatever is trivial, whatever is not right, whatever is impure, whatever is unlovely, whatever is not worth repeating, if there is anything not morally excellent and if there is anything unworthy of praising, do not think about these things.”^{xix}

Godly thinking patterns also involve the discipline of rejection.

Say no to the wrong things . . . and say yes to the right things. Dwell on these things . . . ponder these things.

The verb to ponder or dwell is the word *logizomai* from which we get our word logarithm. Paul is effectively telling us that we must give the same deliberate, prolonged effort of these thought patterns that it takes to solve a mathematical problem.^{xx} And for some of us, that takes more effort than others.

And you will never master the discipline of these 8 guidelines – and it will not get any easier – you will never master them, but you must maintain the pursuit of these things . . . lest you be mastered by the wrong things.

It isn't going to happen in 60 seconds . . . you're in this battle for a lifetime.

Alan Redpath was preaching to his congregation at the Moody Church many years ago; and he said to them, “I have no magic formula for your holiness; I have no hocus pocus treatment too offer you; *I have no shortcut to spiritual strength* for any of you. All I can do is say, “Go back to your Bible . . . Go back to your Bible.”

You cannot be profoundly influenced by that which you do not know!

Now Paul slips in a **personal illustration** – *verse 9, The things you have learned and received and*

heard and seen in me, practice these things – and here’s **the promise** – **and the God of peace will be with you.**

Paul tells us to not only ponder these things, but now he tells us to practice these things.

- **The things you have learned** (from Paul’s teaching and preaching);
- **What you have received** (in the form of apostolic authority)
- **What you have heard** (with their own ears as they conversed with Paul and other believers)
- **What you have seen in me** (in the form of personal observation of Paul’s life – listen, many of them knew the old Paul; they had seen the radical transformation of his life – they could testify to the changes they saw in Paul)

Practice these things.

In other words, don’t just think about these things . . . apply them. Translate biblical principles into biblical practices.

We refer to a lawyer’s practice or a doctor’s practice – not because they’re practicing on us – at least we hope not – we call it their practice because that’s what they do.^{xxi}

These thought patterns should be what Christians do. And do it now – exclamation point.

When you delay an obedient response to God, when you tell God, “Lord, there’s something You’ve challenged my heart and my mind about and I’m gonna get it straightened out next week – or next year – or at my new job once I leave this old job – or when I retire – or when the kids leave the house.”

All that might make you feel better for the moment – you’ve eased your conscience . . . the problem is, God wants your conscience to be troubled. And He’s the one troubling it.

And that’s because, as Paul Tripp wrote, delay is really disobedience in a tuxedo.^{xxii}

It looks better . . . but it’s still disobedience.

But if you obey . . . **the God of peace will be with you.**

You won’t just ease your conscience – you’ll confess it . . . and clear it . . . and enjoy a clean conscience as you put into practice these patterns of thought.

One Sunday on their way home from church a little girl turned to her mother and said, “Mommy, the preacher confused me today.” Her mother asked her to explain why and she responded, “Well, he said that God is bigger than we are. Is that true?” “Yes,” said her mother. “He also said that God lives in us. Is that true?” “Yes, that’s true as well.” “Well, if God is bigger than us and He lives in us, then wouldn’t He show through?”^{xxiii}

He certainly will. These godly thought patterns reflect the mind of Christ. And when our minds practice what Christ demonstrated perfectly – at those moments – He shows through.

He shows through. So . . . what’s on your mind?

Is it:

True
Honorable
Right
Pure
Lovely
Commendable

Is it excellent and worthy of praise?

Good . . . stay at it . . . keep practicing.

And while you work at these disciplines, your conscience is actually able to rest and enjoy the peace of God . . . and the God of peace.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 5/1/2016 by Stephen Davey.

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ⁱAdapted from David W. Henderson, *Tranquility* (Baker Books, 2016), p. 14

ⁱⁱ Adapted from MacArthur, *Philippians* (Moody Publishers, 2001), p. 286

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- iii Sam Gordon, Philippians: An Odyssey of Joy (Ambassador, 2004), p. 165
- iv Adapted from R. Kent Hughes, Philippians (Crossway, 2007), p. 174
- v G. Walter Hansen, The Letter to the Philippians (Eerdmans, 2009), p. 295
- vi Adapted from MacArthur, p. 285
- vii Life Application Bible Commentary, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon (Tyndale, 1995), p. 113
- viii J.A. Motyer, The Message of Philippians (IVP Academic, 1984), p. 212
- ix William Barclay, The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians and Thessalonians (Westminster Press, 1975), p. 79
- x Adapted from Hughes, p. 175
- xi Louis Upkins, Treat Me Like A Customer (Zondervan, 2009): citation: www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2010/april/3040510.html
- xii J. Dwight Pentecost, The Joy of Living: A Study of Philippians (Zondervan, 1973), p. 197
- xiii David G. Meyers, quoted in Arthur Boers, Living Into Focus (InterVarsity Press, 2012), p. 98
- xiv R. Kent Hughes, The Disciplines of a Godly Man (Crossway Books, 1991), p. 74
- xv —David Frost
- xvi Gordon, p. 167
- xvii Ralph Earle, Word Meanings in the New Testament (Baker, 1986), p. 346
- xviii Barclay, p. 80
- xix Adapted from Hughes, Philippians, p. 176
- xx Hughes, p. 177
- xxi Adapted from MacArthur, p. 291
- xxii *Adapted from Paul Tripp, Sex & Money (Crossway, 2013), p. 120*
- xxiii Gordon, p. 168