

BELPRES  CHURCH

**Sermon Title: Change Your Mind**

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**Scripture:**

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Philippians 4: 4-13

<sup>4</sup> Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! <sup>5</sup> Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. <sup>6</sup> Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

<sup>8</sup> Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. <sup>9</sup> Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

<sup>10</sup> I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. <sup>11</sup> I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. <sup>12</sup> I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. <sup>13</sup> I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

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**Transcript:**

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Great to see all of you. Thank you for joining us. Those of you joining online, thank you so much for joining us. We're glad that you are all here. Whether online or here in the room, great to have you.

The passage I will be preaching from comes from Philippians chapter 4. And it says this, "Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, if anything is excellent or praiseworthy, think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me or seen in me, put it into practice, and the God of peace will be with you." Well, when I was little, I remember one time asking my mother, "Mom, how do I make my brain stop thinking?" And she looked at me with this kind of puzzled look and she said, "You're the weirdest kid I have," which is a true statement. My siblings are less weird than me. And what I meant was, I just, even as a kid, I couldn't get my brain to turn off. It's why now, as an adult, it can sometimes take me one, two, three hours to sleep at night because my brain keeps thinking.

And you want to guess what my brain is thinking about in those hours? Am I thinking about how great things are? Am I thinking about that nice email I got that day? Yeah, no, no. There's one guy in the front row here shaking his head, yes. No, you don't know me well enough. Not so much. Not so much. No. I'm thinking about all the problems, the challenges, the criticism.

I think most of us struggle with thoughts that we wish we didn't have sometimes, lustful thoughts that we can't control, judgmental thoughts that just pop into our heads, angry thoughts that make us miserable, and worried thoughts. And boy howdy, is there a lot of negative things to ponder these days. Right? And you know the litany, you know the list. People are punching flight attendants in the face because they were asked to wear a mask. Oh, my goodness. I've talked to dozens of people whose families aren't talking because of vaccination status or politics. Of course, the pandemic is still with us. And the news just seems bad, bad, bad. What one of our elders this week called, the vortex of doom. Just love that. It's like a roller coaster ride, the vortex of doom.

In the middle of that, along comes the Apostle Paul with the verses I just read and says, "Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, if anything is excellent or praiseworthy, think about these things." In other words, change what you're thinking. Okay, but how? Right? Because as I just said, we can't always control our thoughts. And how do you focus on the good in a way that isn't just like Pollyanna and cliché and just kind of saccharin? Just look at the bright side. You look at the bright side. I'm miserable and I like it that way.

Now, how do we do this when we think about good things, when we face really, really hard things as some of you do? Well, I'll get to that in a minute. But I just want to note something here. The Apostle Paul is onto something, because a few verses before the ones I just read, he says, "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again, rejoice." Who is he saying this to? Christians who are being killed for their faith. Where is he writing this from? Prison, where he's being beaten, really hard, and still, he says, rejoice. Not once, he says it twice. Not just hang in there, not just barely get by. Rejoice, celebrate.

And then, he goes on to say, "I know what it is to be in need. I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any situation, whether living in plenty or in want." And then, he concludes with the well-known verses, gets quoted a lot, people quote it a lot, shows up in inspirational social media posts, athletes quote it: "I can do all things", through Bible verses ripped out of context. I mean, "through Christ who strengthens me." I'm sorry.

Okay, that verse isn't about being able to achieve all of our American dreams. Quite the opposite, quite the opposite. It's about having joy in any circumstance, when you are winning and when you are losing, when you are in prison and when you are not, when you are being persecuted for your faith and when you are not. And Paul's bottom line in these verses is, if you change your thinking, you will change your life.

And we see it in the structure of the verses, right? Because he says, whatever is true, noble, pure, et cetera, think about these things. Next verse, Whatever you have seen or learned or see in me, put it into practice. So these verses are linked by the word whatever, and he moves from think on this, thinking to doing. Put it into practice. Change your mind, and you will change your life, to have more hope, more courage, more joy in any circumstance.

And Paul lists eight keywords to think on, things to think about. Whatever is true. And for Paul, truth is not an intellectual idea, it is a person named Jesus. Whatever aligns with him, whatever is noble, that means honorable, living in a way that does not bring disgrace, whatever is right, which means it aligns with what God says is right in scripture, whatever is pure, whatever leads to a clean conscience, whatever is lovely, that means beautiful, inspiring, whatever is admirable, whatever is excellent, whatever's praiseworthy. Other translations say, commendable, things you'd recommend to other people. Wherever you find these eight things in your life or in the world, think about that. And then, put them into practice, not just in the big things of life, but even in the little things of life.

I saw a post this week where someone said, "I can get road rage walking behind people in the grocery store." That is so me. Is that any of you?

Yay. I'm not alone. Over there in the sanctuary, not one person said that they feel that way. My fellow sinners, I am glad to be among you. Okay. That is not like I'm standing there like, oh, just get out of the way. That's not moving toward the true, the good, the noble, the pure, right? That's the opposite. Although really you could move to the side, just saying. that's not a word from the Lord. Okay, that's just, you could move to the side.

Paul says, though, if we think about these eight words, there's a promise, the God of peace will be with you. And peace in the Bible never just means absence of conflict, absence of hardship. It always means the presence of wholeness and being rightly related to God, each other and the world. And the way we get there is to change what we're thinking. So how do we do that, as I said? How do we do that in a way that doesn't just ignore the problems, pretend everything's okay? And how do we control our thoughts? One of the things I hate when I'm worried about something and someone says to me, well, just don't worry about it. Well, if I could not worry about it, I would. Right? Don't think about it. Okay. When someone says, don't think about it, what are you thinking about? It. Right? The thing, right? So, how do we do this? I'm going to give you a bunch of, kind of suggestions and you just pick the one you like the best. Okay?

First, in order to change your mind, so you can change your life, focus on Jesus. You're in a church. You might have expected this one. Taken together, these eight words have a name. Jesus. Jesus is all of these words. Jesus love you so much he would rather die than lose you. So he did. That is true. And it is a noble thing and it is right, and it is pure, it is beautiful, it is admirable, excellent and praiseworthy. Focus on Jesus. So how do we do that? Here's some

action steps. Between now and January, read all four gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, which are about Jesus' life, to get to know him. And as you read, write down words that describe Jesus and keep a journal. Also ask Jesus to help you see the things in your life that are or true noble, right, et cetera, because sometimes we miss them. This is supernatural. We cannot control our thinking on our own. We need Jesus' help. So ask him. Ask him to help you focus on things that are right, true, good, noble and all the rest, so we don't miss them. Right?

Second way to change your mind so that you can change your life, is to control the inputs. I cannot always control what my brain thinks. I can't always control the output of my brain, but I can control the input. Whatever's true, noble, right, pure, lovely, input those things into your brain and not negative things. It's like baking. Okay. If you're going to bake a cake, but you don't have eggs or sugar and flour, you can't bake the cake because you don't have the necessary ingredients. And yes, I know some of you literalists right now thinking, well, there are flourless vegan cakes. You could... It's a metaphor. Okay? Just go with it. If you don't have the right ingredients, you can't bake something. So, if our brains have fewer negative ingredients in them, that limits our brain's options to cook up negative thoughts. So if you struggle with lustful thoughts, be careful about the TV and the movies that you consume. Don't put a lot of lustful ingredients in your brain so your brain can cook up lust. If you're angry a lot, don't put a lot of angry ingredients in your brain so that your brain can cook up anger. If your brain doesn't have the ingredients, it'll be harder for it to cook up negative things. Control the input. I recently read a study from Dartmouth University, shouldn't surprise us, that found over the last year, that they found that 87% of national COVID news coverage has been negative. Even when cases were low and declining. However, only 64% of stories in scientific journals have been negative.

In other words, the national news was telling us to be 23% more afraid than the scientists were telling us to be. Now, don't hear what I did not say. I didn't say COVID is no big deal. No, it is a serious threat that we have to take seriously. But the national media made COVID 23% worse than the scientist said it was. Local media did much better. Only 53% of local media stories were negative, more balanced. In fact, one of the things I appreciate about Seattle local media is they've done a number of stories on us as a church when we've done something good, which tells me they're looking for good stories to tell as well. And what's true of COVID coverage is almost certainly of everything else, coverage on the economy and politics and everything else. And all of this, as we know, is making us more fearful and

more angry than reality. Objectively speaking, lots of things have never been better. Gun violence, crime, warfare, global hunger are at historic lows. We just don't hear about that. Now I'm not talking about ignoring the serious problems in our world. We have serious problems, we need to pay attention to them. The problem is we're wildly out of balance. We are not thinking about both the good and the bad. We're just focused on the bad, which means we're not looking at reality. And in that state, we will never be able to come up with good solutions because we're not living in the real world. And these studies also show that all these things that are making us angry and fearful are destroying the one thing that every study shows brings lasting happiness, which is relationships.

Our brains were not made for this much negative information and it's killing us. Another study told people to delete all social media and news for four weeks. And at the end of those four weeks, those people were less politically divisive, felt better about the other side of them politically and were less anxious and angry. Four weeks, that's it.

So here are a few action steps. Simple. Limit the amount of time you spend on social media and news. One of the guidelines the CDC issued in the middle of COVID was to kind of consume less news, consume less news on TV, radio, social media, for your mental health. That recommendation didn't make the news very much. Gee, why is that? Why wouldn't they report? Why wouldn't the news tell us about a story that said don't watch so much news. That's amazing. Limit how much time you spend on news and social media. No more than 30 minutes a day.

And also just use less divisive sources and angry. You might also consider eliminating them entirely for a couple of weeks, like the people in the study, just to kind of rebalance your brain. But don't just limit, also replace, put positive things in your brain, podcast, music, books, art, friends. Or here's an action step, spend twice as much time in prayer, worship and scripture, as you do on social media and news every day. You spend 30 minutes on news and social media, that means you're going to spend an hour in prayer, worship and Bible and talk to Jesus more. One of the things I do when I can't go to sleep is I talk to Jesus and it helps. And I should all also say, if you are struggling with chronic depression, then you also probably need to see a therapist and a doctor for help. But for all of us, if we control the inputs a little more, we will have more courage, hope, and joy. And then finally, a third way to change our mind so we can change our lives, a third way to do that is to savor the good. We are very good at savoring, the bad, right? We can get 10 positive emails and one negative email. What's the one we obsess on all day? And today's

text is all about savoring the good things, thinking about them over and over and not just the big, dramatic good things, but every day little good things.

One of my regrets is that when my kids were growing up, they would say I did a pretty good job of being there for them, that I was pretty present, but my regret is I didn't savor the good moments enough, like when I was watching them swim or when we're having fun as a family, or even just when they were little kids, holding them. I didn't pause enough to savor it and take that mental and emotional picture and say, this is good. Thank you, God. My brain was often just so cluttered with everything that I just didn't take time to savor things. I just blow right past those daily ordinary moments. And there are a couple that we can savor the good. First ask Jesus to help you see the good, so you don't just blow right by it. Help in the moment. Say, Jesus, help me see it. And then just be present in the moment. Pause, stop, say, this is good. Take that mental picture. And then thank God for it. Giving thanks is one of the best things we can do to savor the good. Right before the verses we read today, Paul says, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation by prayer and petition with thanksgiving," good word for this week, "present your request to God and the peace of God which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Remember, he's writing this from prison to Christians who are being killed for their faith. And he says, don't be anxious. He's talking about a supernatural peace that goes beyond our understanding. A peace that doesn't make sense when you're in the middle of being persecuted. It's not natural. It's supernatural. And giving thanks is critical because it reminds us that life is never 100% awful. It may be 98% awful, but it's never a hundred percent. There's always something or someone in our lives that is good, that is pure, that is true, that is noble, that is lovely. And I know many of you are going through difficult stuff, loss of a loved one, scary diagnosed. But I've seen in my own life and in many of your lives that even in those hardest of times, there's always something good.

A loved one dies, but you feel the presence of God so powerfully. That was my experience when my dad died. Maybe the cancer is terrible, but your friends show up and you realize how loved you all. It doesn't erase the pain, but it does bring some balance between the good and the bad when we're thankful. So, this week, focus on Jesus, control the inputs, savor the good, give thanks in big ways, but just the daily moments of life.

I've shared with you before that every year I take one of my daughters to the Nutcracker. It's a classical ballet that's always done at Christmas time. And we alternate. One year I'll take my oldest daughter, the next year I'll take my youngest daughter. Back and forth like that every year, starting from when they were really little and we still do it today. Just for some one-on-one time with my daughter. Now I should also say, I have offered to take my son to in the Nutcracker as well. However, he has let it be known that he would rather go to the dentist than suffer such a tragedy. So he and I have done other things together.

But I sometimes wonder if all the princesses and costumes and stuff that's part of that ballet maybe went a little too deep into my daughter's brain because a while back I was talking to my oldest daughter, Holly, and she was telling me about her plans for her wedding. Okay. She's not even dating anybody, but the wedding is planned. Right? She just needs a generic groom to insert into the plans right? Because a groom is like a bathroom in an art museum. A groom at a wedding is like a bathroom in an art museum. You need one, but no one goes there to see it. Right? It's true. And so, she's telling me about her plans. She said, I want a lot of people and a nice sit down dinner. And I said, that's fine. Okay. And then she said, and I want to come and go in a carriage.

And I was like, no, no, no, no, too much Nutcracker, too much Disney. No. No carriage. No. She just ignored me. She kept talking. And she said, and I want a choreographer for the dancing afterwards. No. No choreographer. No. And she said, and I want the father daughter dance to be choreographed. And I said, I can't dance when I make up the moves, let alone to choreography. Right? And she said, no, no, dad, the father daughter dance has to be choreographed because I want it to be to music from the Nutcracker. Right? Tear my heart out, right? I got all choked up. Fine, you can have your choreographer, but no carriage.

And then later that day, I just kind of felt God say to me, don't blow past that moment, Scott. Think about it. This is good. You and your kids have good memories together. Not every anybody gets that. Input this moment into your brain. Thank me for it and savor it. And I started to think about when she was little and all my good intentions, some of which I did, and some of which I did not do. But in that moment I felt God say, but something were good. Think on those things and don't just blow past it. And as I did that, I didn't feel like I was just hanging in there, barely making it, I felt like I was rejoicing in the abundant goodness of God, that's everywhere around.



I don't know about you, but sometimes often, I can get so focused on what's wrong, what needs fixing, what I'm worried about, what my failures are. And some of that is good because it helps me improve. But I go overboard. And sometimes I neglect to also think about the good things. I've got great kids. I have an awesome wife. I have a job I love even though it's hard and heartbreaking, even when I hate it, I love it. I've got really good friends. And when I look back across my life, it is clear that God has never abandoned me. There have been times I've felt abandoned. There been some very painful and really difficult times. And sometimes it took years to see it, but God used every painful thing for good. I have lived in the goodness of God. And when I think of those things, in the words of a song we're about to sing, I see the evidence of God's goodness all over my life. I see his promises in fulfillment all over my life and I am thankful for it.

So this Thanksgiving week, whatever's true, whatever's noble, whatever's right and pure and lovely, whatever is admirable, if anything is excellent or praiseworthy, think about those things to change your mind, which will change your life.

So Jesus, thank you. You are the author of everything that is good. And Lord, even in the hard things, even in the painful things, we know that you are there, that you are turning ashes into beauty. You are turning mourning into rejoicing. Lord, we know that even when life is very hard, that you are still putting good things into our lives. And this week, help us to see the good things, help us to see the evidence of your goodness in us, through us, around us. Jesus, you are good all the time, all the time you are good. And we live in the goodness of God. Help us to see it. We pray this in your name, Jesus. Amen.

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**Discussion Questions:** Philippians 4:4-13

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*Read this week's scripture(s) & answer the below questions with your friends, family, or All In small group.*

**Opening Questions:**

- Icebreaker: What is one of your favorite family traditions?
- Looking back, were you able to apply any of the things we talked about last time to your life this week? What did you do? How did it go?

**Scripture Reflection Questions:**

- What do we learn about God (e.g., traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage and sermon?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

**Sermon Reflection Questions** - *Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:*

- What are things in your life that match the 8 words the Apostle Paul tells us to think about in verse 8?
- Looking at verses 4-13, what is the most helpful advice Paul gives here. Why?
- What is one thing God has done in your life for which you are thankful?

**Closing Question and Application:**

- Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you to apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week?
- Who might you share this with?

**Closing Group Prayer:**

- Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.
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