

Series: Side by Side
Message Title: **Prayer Shapes Thoughts**
Date: Sunday, June 3, 2018
Scripture: Philippians 4:8-9
Speaker: David H. McKinley
Location: Warren Baptist Church, Augusta, GA

Introduction

I have a little bright, yellow book in my library given to me by one of our Warren members by author, Tommy Newberry. The book is entitled, *The 4:8 Principle*.

In this book, the author states, "Most people are oblivious to their habitual way of thinking... Most of your thinking is more like background noise while you engage in other activities. Yet behind everything you do is a thought, and each individual thought contributes to your overall character. How well your mind works dictates how much joy you experience, how successful you feel, and how well you interact with other people. No area of your life is untouched by your thoughts. Your habitual thinking patterns either encourage you toward excellence or nudge you into weakness."

—Tommy Newberry

With this foundation, the author proceeds to unpack *The 4:8 Principle*. But what is it? How did he discover it? What validates it?

I'll come back to that, but our thoughts shape our lives. What is occupying and preoccupying your thoughts today? You may be here, but what you are thinking about may take you far away from here. Our thoughts shape our lives because what we think, we eventually do! This is the 4:8 principle.

While Tommy wrote the book, the Apostle Paul was the first to pen it.

"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" (Philippians 4:8-9 ESV).

The human mind is always "set" on something, but Paul is challenging a distinctively different "mindset."

Paul had every reason to feel negative, cynical and frustrated by his life and circumstance. Yet in the midst of writing to the church at Philippi, Paul challenged the believers there to rise above the world's way of viewing and valuing life.

Paul discusses anxiety—a common human malady—and then links prayer to the reshaping of our thought life. Prayer leads us to surrender, and from this surrender comes a reformation of our thoughts before God.

“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Romans 12:1-2 ESV).

Paul is providing instruction and promise through The 4:8 Principle.

“Peace is not the absence of problems, but learning to think and relate rightly to God in all things.”

Read Philippians 4:8 again! In the midst of all we encounter and face in life, we are to focus our attention and meditate on the character of God in all things.

For this reason, Paul specifically linked our inner thought life to our outer condition. Paul links emotional anxiety to mental and spiritual integrity with God. It puts the heart and the mind in sync through prayer.



Prayer is More About Thoughts Shaped Than Words Expressed

Funny, most people are concerned about what they should say when they pray.

But nowhere are we given rote or ritual prayers. Probably the best known prayer in the Bible is what we call, "The Lord's Prayer."

"And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him. Pray then

like this: 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven'" (Matthew 6:7-10 ESV).

Jesus doesn't say, "When you pray, say these words." He says, "When you pray, pray like this." This is the be the focus, the thought and the resolution of prayer.

Prayer Directs Our Thoughts to the Character of God Rather Than the Conversations and Circumstances of Life

Think about these virtues and how they point us to focus and reflect on the character of God.

If right thoughts of God rule in your mind, then the righteousness and goodness of God will rule in your mind and heart through our Lord Jesus Christ.

"Through prayer we see life through the lens of God's presence rather than His absence, His activity rather than His complacency, and His purpose rather than our pain, and subsequently we change our thoughts and actions."

We live in a world of toxic talk and thought. This is why Paul provides a list for us to evaluate our thoughts:

- True—not opinion, common, trending, suggested, suspicioned
- Honorable—not frivolous or trivial
- Just—not complacency—duty, justice
- Pure
- Lovely—not factional, separatist, contentious
- Commendable

If excellent, praiseworthy...

The NPT (Negative Paraphrase Translation) states it this way: "Finally, folks, whatever is untrue, deceitful, dishonorable, unjust, impure, filthy, hateful, vicious, despicable and worthy of criticism, think on these things!"

Of course, there is no Negative Paraphrase Translation, but this is what would be included if there was.

We live in a world highlighting what is wrong with just about everything, and the result? We are corrupting our minds

"Negative thinking corrupts your brain and triggers harmful mental states such as anxiety,

moodiness, depression, and irritability. Unless you train your mind constructively, your thinking becomes automatic, impulsive and often erroneous. Your thoughts often misrepresent reality by bending, distorting, deleting, exaggerating and otherwise manipulating the truth.” —Tommy Newberry

Sounds like fake news to me!

Paul says, “Think on these things” (*logizomai* = logic; take into account, calculate, process these things).

Prayer Invites God’s Security Rather Than the World’s Hack Into Your Soul

The world is full of hackers wanting to destroy the integrity of our minds and hearts toward God.

“For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete” (2 Corinthians 10:4-6 ESV).

“And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless” (Romans 1:28-31 ESV).

“Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. But that is not the way you learned Christ!” (Ephesians 4:17-20 ESV).

The mind is the strategic fortress for every battle in life.

“In secularism, all life, every human value, every human activity must be understood in

light of the present time... What matters is now and only now. All access to the above and beyond is blocked. There is no exit from the confines of this present world." —R. C. Sproul

For this reason, military terminology is used to describe God's defense of our minds in Philippians 4:7.

We are what we think! You cannot think one thing and experience something else. As long as you have the "virus" of God-forsaken thought, you will be a victim of God-dishonoring anxiety and activity.

Prayer That Reshapes Your Thoughts Will Redirect Your Actions

"What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you" (Philippians 4:9 ESV).

Paul isn't suggesting we just sit around and "rethink" life, but that we allow our thoughts to "retool" our lives in action.

Paul takes his instruction and puts it into action. Note the point of action: learned, received, heard, and seen. Practice = keep it going, rehearse it! Because what you think will ultimately determine how you live.

“Sow a thought, reap a deed; sow a deed, reap a habit; sow a habit, reap a character; sow a character, reap a destiny.”

What actions are presented and challenged through the message today?

1. Shape each day with Scripture.

Don't be shaped by trends, but by truth.
Read Scripture!

2. Write and rehearse a profile of God's character.

Who is God? I have listed 12 of God's attributes, but there are more!

God is a personal spirit.
God is all powerful.
God is ever present.
God is fully knowing.

God is sovereign.
God is holy.
God is love.
God is absolute truth.
God is just.
God is faithful.
God is unchanging.
God is good.

3. Surround yourself with thinking activists.

If all you read, hear and discuss has to do with conversations opposite of what is listed here, get some people in your life who are careful to follow the pattern of *The 4:8 Principle*.

4. Count on God's presence in your circumstance.

"And the God of peace will be with you..."