

TRUTHS THAT TRANSFORM

THINK EXCELLENT THOUGHTS

“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.” *Philippians 4:8*

I want to talk to you about your mind this morning. This is a very, very important topic. It's a funny thing. If you were to get the greatest performance car in the world, decide that you were going to take a serious run at the Indy 500 and dedicate yourself to winning it, what would the odds be that you would fill that performance car with low octane gasoline from a thrifty discount service station? (Not very high.)

Or imagine you were really serious about competing in an Olympic Marathon. You found out you had a real shot at winning it. This became the all-consuming goal of your life. How likely is it that you would go on an all Twinkies diet between now and the race?

Overall people are real careful about what they put into their cars, what they feed their children, even what they feed their pets, and especially what they put into their bodies.

What you put into your body has become a multi, multi-billion dollar industry. People stay up at nights trying to convince you that they know what your body needs. "The secret to your body's health is a high-carb, low-fat diet," some say. Or others say, "No, the secret is high protein, fat is okay, no carbs at all." Or some say, "The secret is the right percentage — 30/30/40 split." Or some say, "The secret is to avoid sugar at all costs."

Or some say the secret is the particular product they happen to push. The secret is Atkin's bars or Power bars or protein shakes or Wheatgerm shakes or shakes with kale. My own conviction is that secret to a healthy body is St. Louis-style Barbeque Ribs with sweet potato fries or corn bread and cole slaw on the side.

Friends, we're real aware that the fuel that goes into the things that matter to us ultimately determine their performance and their well being which is why it is so ironic that in the most important area of all life, we disregard this one basic piece of wisdom.

And that area involves your mind. What you feed everything else you own or possess is nothing compared to the importance of what you feed your mind. And that's why Paul says the truth that will transform your life that we will focus on today is to "think excellent thoughts."

I want to introduce you to two truths about your mind this morning. The first truth is simply this: You are what you think. Psychologist Arch Hart writes it like this: "Research has shown that one's thought life influences every aspect of one's being.

The way that you think is the single most important shaper of who you are as a person. The way you think creates your attitudes. The way you think shapes your emotions. The way you think affects your behavior. The way you think even has a lot to do with your immune system and your vulnerability to illness.

Everything about you that matters flows out of what happens in your mind. That's why Paul says, ***"Don't be molded by this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."*** *Romans 12:2*

That's why the writer of Proverbs says, ***"As a man thinks in his heart, so is he."*** *Proverbs 23:7* That's why Jesus would say things like, ***"A good tree can't produce bad fruit; the bad tree can't produce good fruit."*** *Matthew 7:17* He's talking about what goes on inside of you, your thought processes. When they're healthy, they will produce a good life. They can't produce a bad one. When they are diseased, unhealthy, destructive, and sinful, they can't produce a good life. You are what you think.

There are a lot of things about yourself that you have no choice over. The color of your eyes – you had no choice over that one. You didn't get to select your eyes out of a catalog and place an order for your eye color. Your parents – you had no choice

over your family – for good, bad, or crazy. Your birthday, your height, your gender, inherited health conditions, how your lungs breathe, that your heart beats – all those you have no control over.

When it comes to your mind, do you know that you DO have control over what goes on in your thought life? The Bible would agree. You CAN choose what you think about. This is why in the Bible verse we are focusing on today, God guided Paul to say, ***“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.”*** *Philippians 4:8* Think about such things. Choose what you fill your mind with.

When God tells us to think about what is true, that means that He wants us to focus our attention on his Word. And we know that Christ **IS** truth. Jesus said, ***“I am the Way and the Truth, and the Life.”*** *John 14:6* He is the final and complete revelation from God. That means, Jesus pictures and represents God perfectly. His words, His love, His moral standards – that’s God’s truth. From Jesus and through Jesus we can know the truth. So our Father wants us to fill our minds with His Word, with what the Bible tells us about what His Son, Jesus, did and said. Truth.

When we’re told to think about whatever is noble, this is a word that means a person who is of good character, honorable, and respectable. Turn on TV, social media, or the internet, and its hard to find people who are showing us what it is to be honorable and respectable. Mostly in the media today, people try to get attention by being DIShonorable and DISrespectful. It’s the DIShonorable and DISrespectful actions that people want to see because its shocking and sensational. DIS honorable and DIS respectful things go viral – people pass it along to others saying, “Look at this! It’s a different level kind of immorality than we’ve ever seen. Its sunk to a new low.” Things push the line farther and farther, get more and more vulgar with each new post, with each new movie, with each new TV show. Friends, do you see

that it is harder now than at any other time in our lives to think about things that are of good character, honorable, and respectful? So we have to be real selective to ask ourselves, “Is this showing me good character, honorable, respectable behavior?” Nobel.

When we’re called to think about whatever is **right**, God is telling us to focus our attention on those things that are **just**. This means choose to think on things that are in line with His 10 Commandments.

And then the apostle calls us to think about whatever is pure, lovely, and admirable -- what is holy, and innocent. Am I focusing my mind on what is morally pure and undefiled? Clean, pure thoughts, words, and deeds. Is it clean and holy?

The word for lovely refers to Something that is loving – not lustful, but loving. Loving is putting the other person and his or her welfare first before myself. Loving is serving the other person. Lustful is taking from another person what I want to please myself.

Commendable – or Anything that is of good report. This means speaking fairly about others. Not putting people down, but telling the good about other people. How different political debates would be if our politicians did not seek to tear each other apart with their words!

Paul then tells us to think about things that are admirable. And the word for admirable describes what is worthy of praise. What is so good that we want to praise another person or speak good about something we’ve seen?

In a similar way, we’re called to think about those things that are excellent. This refers to *moral* excellence, *morally* pure. Think morally pure thoughts.

Imagine that everyone else around you could hear your thoughts. What would it be like if what you think in your mind was broadcast over a loudspeaker for everyone to hear? Would you be proud? Are *your* thoughts true, noble, right, just, pure, lovely,

admirable, holy, innocent, commendable, admirable, morally excellent and pure?

I am so glad that my thoughts are not broadcast, aren't you? I'm thankful other people don't know what runs through my mind because, I'm not proud. You too?

You know what? God *does* know your thoughts. He knows every single thing you think, even before you do. You can hide your thoughts from other people. You can put on a good show for others, but you can't hide what's inside you from God.

We give a lot of air time in our minds to sinful thoughts. Sometimes we mentally rehash how people have hurt us. Sometimes we fill our thoughts with plans about how to get rich. Sometimes we fill our minds with lustful thoughts. Other times we are thinking about congratulating ourselves when we proudly turn over in our minds how good we are at something.

Friends, if we give these evil thoughts a place, eventually our minds will become sewers of evil. This is wrong. This is sinful. Most Sundays when we gather here we say, "*Most merciful God, we confess that we are by nature sinful and unclean. We have sinned against You in thought, word, and deed....*" It is not just what you say and what you do that have made you impure. But your thoughts have made you unfit for heaven, unfit for being with a God who loves you who is holy, pure, right, noble, excellent. Your sinful thoughts have made you completely deserving of eternal hell.

And yet God, your Father, because He loves you, and made you, and wants you, provided for your sinful, impure, embarrassing thoughts to be forgiven. But it cost God. Your Father in Heaven gave up His only Son to suffer and die to pay for all these sins of yours.

God is gracious and kind. He is willing to forgive you completely, because the price of your wrongs has been paid. Jesus, the only human being with 100% gracious, compassionate, loving, commendable thoughts forgives the sins of your mind. Simply trust that what He has done is true, and is for you!

Paul says to us today, ***“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.”*** *Philippians 4:8* Think about such things! Don’t go back to the old sewer mind. Once forgiven, don’t go back into the same old sin again. Change the patterns of your mind.

It sounds like its impossible for you and me to do that. By yourself it is impossible. But your mind can be changed by the goodness and power of your loving God.

The Bible says you won’t be able to think only about what is good and right by your own strength. We’re evil by nature and our thoughts are depraved. But Jesus Christ wants to work this change of thinking in His people. Christ renews our thinking so that we learn to fill our minds with the beautiful things that are from God.

Asking God to change your thinking is important to pray about. And God will help you fill your mind with who He is, what He has done, and the things that are true, just, pure, admirable, and beautiful. Do you know what the result is of this kind of thinking? You will be blessed with a deep sense of his peace.

That’s the promise God makes here. In the next verse, after calls you to think excellent thoughts, Paul says, ***“And the God of peace will be with you.”***

...If there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. ⁹ 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*

By turning our minds to the beautiful things of the Lord, Christ grants a real presence of peace within us. We receive freedom from guilt and shame, contentment in life, and an incredible joy in the Lord because of how He feels about you and what He has done for you.

Remember I said there are two main truths about your mind. The first truth God says: You are what you think. This is what

Paul means when he tells you: ***“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.”*** *Philippians 4:8*

Now, what’s the second truth? The second truth might be called the law of exposure, and it is this: Your mind will think most about what it is most exposed to. What enters your mind repeatedly occupies your mind, and eventually shapes your mind, and ultimately expresses itself in what you do and who you become.

How do you change what your mind focusses on? It depends on what you expose it to. Your mind will think about what it is most exposed to.

This truth is as inevitable as the law of gravity. And yet people act surprised by it.

Nobody is surprised by the law of gravity. Nobody says, "I dropped an egg on the concrete and it shattered. What were the odds of that?" But amazingly enough, people act as if the law of exposure comes as a total shock. And people seem to be surprised that what their mind is constantly exposed to and tends to and dwells on eventually comes out in how they feel and what they do.

So children in our day are exposed to thousands of acts of violence and murder on television and even more graphic violence in movies. They see it on video games; they observe symbols and images associated with gang violence glorified in our culture, and then we act as if it’s a surprising thing somehow when there is violence in our school or that juvenile crime is on the rise.

But the truth is simply that it takes self-restraint to create a society that will produce minds that have not been saturated with violence from the cradle on.

We are flooded with sexual images from screens. Sexually explicit messages and images are sent not just to adults who ask

for them, not just to teenagers, but to children who sit in front of a computer screen and have virtually no chance to protect themselves, who don't even know what it is they're getting into.

And they get bombarded by this stuff all the time. Then we profess to be surprised when promiscuity goes up and sexual addictions become rampant and marital fidelity goes down and marital stability goes down and the family unit is failing. This is the law of exposure, and it is inevitable.

Friends, the events you attend, the materials that you read or you don't read, the music that you listen to, the images you watch, the conversations that you hold, the daydreams that you entertain, these are shaping your mind, and eventually your character, and ultimately your eternal destiny. That's what is at stake here.

Well, Paul says, "Think excellent thoughts." And it really is possible for you to begin to do this, but it will not happen automatically. You're not going to drift into it, and this world will not drift you into it.

The first step is this: You need to begin by monitoring your mind. You need to begin by just becoming aware of what kind of thoughts, in fact, do habitually run through your mind.

So I challenge you, you can start today. As you go through this day, stop at ordinary moments through the day and ask yourself, "What's running through my mind right now?" For example, the next time that you're in a car and you get cut off on the expressway as you're driving, what kind of thoughts run through your mind? Are they excellent and praiseworthy and admirable thoughts?

If you are watching TV, stop and examine what's going on in your thoughts. Notice what the triggers are to bad thinking. What program, what time of day, am I tired, alert, energized.

Notice what the triggers are and consciously, intentionally **CHANGE** those situations. That is, you need to expose your mind to those resources — books, people, conversations — that will incline you to the right kinds of thoughts and protect you from

the wrong kinds of damaging influences because every source will move your mind one way or another.

Being a Christian is not for wimps. It will take hard work. You may have to quit your favorite program. Change your TV provider. Change the apps on your phone or tablet. Change your whole daily routine around to keep your mind away from being exposed to things that lead your thoughts to sin.

If you struggle with greedy thoughts, you'll want to block shopping sites like Amazon, and shopping channels on TV. If you struggle with gossip or jealousy, no more social media for you.

If you struggle with angry thoughts, maybe no more news feeds or channels.

On the flip side, fill up your mind with good things. This takes work too. Change to listen to Christian music or Christian talk radio. Make a simple commitment to say, "When the church gathers together to study Scripture and to worship, I will be there." And you need to know for 2,000 years that to not make that commitment has been unthinkable to Christ followers.

Learn to meditate on Scripture. If you know how to worry, you know how to meditate because meditation is just kind of a positive form of worry. You just take one thought, and you dwell on it and linger on it and absorb it until it becomes a part of you. You meditate on Scripture, on God's promises to you.

Put symbols around you. Crosses on the wall, or Christian art work are real powerful for helping you fill your mind with excellent thoughts.

We live in a world where messages are so often just twisted or trivial or silly or foolish or self-absorbed or downright evil, I'd love to have the kind of mind that is filled with excellent, admirable, honorable, praiseworthy thoughts." Can you imagine what it would be like if we had a whole church of people who thought that way? A whole city of people who thought that way? A whole county, or State, or nation, or world of people who thought excellent thoughts?

“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. ⁹ 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

This is the truth that will transform your life: Think excellent thoughts.

AMEN.