



Finding Our Way With Technology (Our Mind)

Summary and Goal

Technology is not going away. If anything, its use is only intensifying. Though the Christian cannot control how society functions technologically, he or she can control what and how much enters their minds. By looking at Philippians 4:8 as a guide, believers can think twice about what they are thinking about, challenging them to be selective with what and how they are putting things into their minds.

Main Passages

Philippians 4:8

Session Outline

1. Think on These Things (Philippians 4:8)
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Theological Theme

Focusing on that which is holy allows the believer to gradually grow in Christlikeness under the leadership of the Holy Spirit.

Christ Connection

Christ provided the perfect model for fixing attention on the divine mission in the midst of all distraction.

Missional Application

In a world that increasingly rejects God, the threat of distraction is a constant reality for the believer. By disciplining himself or herself to focus primarily on that which is congruent with God's character, the believer can offer light and hope to the dark world through the gospel.

Historical Context of Philippians

Purpose

Paul's letter to the Philippians teaches us much about genuine Christianity. While most of its themes may be found elsewhere in Scripture, it is within this letter that we can see how those themes and messages impact life. Within the NT, Philippians contributes to our understanding of Christian commitment and what it means to be Christlike.

Author

Paul the apostle wrote this short letter, a fact that no scholar seriously questions.

Setting

Philippi, the ancient city of Krenides, had a military significance. It was the capital of Alexander the Great, who renamed it for his father Philip of Macedon, and it became the capital of the Greek Empire (332 BC). The Romans conquered Greece, and in the civil war after Julius Caesar's death (44 BC), Antony and Octavius repopulated Philippi by allowing the defeated armies (Brutus and Cassius) to settle there (eight hundred miles from Rome). They declared the city a Roman colony. It flourished, proud of its history and entrenched in Roman political and social life. In his epistle to the Philippians, Paul alludes to military and political structures as metaphors for the church.

Paul thanked the church for their financial support (4:10-20). He also addressed disunity and the threat of heresy. Disunity threatened the church, spawned by personal conflicts (4:2) and disagreements over theology (3:1-16). The heresy came from radical Jewish teachers. Paul addressed both issues personally and warmly.

The church at Philippi sent Epaphroditus to help Paul in Rome. While there he became ill (2:25-28). The church learned of Epaphroditus's illness, and Paul wished to ease their concern for him. Some people possibly blamed Epaphroditus for failing his commission, but Paul commended him and sent him home. Perhaps Epaphroditus carried this letter with him.

Special Features

Philippians is Paul's most warmly personal letter. After initial difficulties in the city of Philippi (Acts 16), a strong bond developed between Paul and the converts there. Paul wrote to thank the church for a gift it had recently sent him in prison and to inform them of his circumstances.

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Session Plan

Finding Our Way With Technology (Our Mind)

Introduction

- ❓ What activity do you spend most of your technological energy on? What does that represent about your priorities? Do you think that it is an accurate reflection?
- ❓ How have you seen your use of technology change over the last year? What is a part of your regular digital menu that was not there a year ago? How has that changed you?
- ❓ What ads do you most vividly remember from your technology use this past week? Where did you see the ad? How does that memory verify the influence technology has, even in casual settings?

In this week's session, Paul directed the believers in Philippi to focus on those things that reflected God's character and holiness. The importance of his direction was found in the numerous distractions the Philippian believers faced: persecution, false religions, false teaching within their own ranks, and potential division within the church. There was much to distract them from gospel effectiveness. In light of that, Paul directed them to focus on godly things so that they might retain their gospel effectiveness.

1. Think on These Things (Philippians 4:8)

The entire structure of this verse is a bit strange for Paul in the sense that he used multiple words that are only found here in the entire body of Paul's writings. The structure actually resembles a list of virtues, most commonly found in Greco-Roman wisdom and philosophical writing. Understanding the context to which he was writing, Paul used the customs and culture of the Roman colony of Philippi to encourage the believers that were suffering for their faith. Paul used a similar approach in his sermon at the Areopagus in Athens about the unknown God in Acts 17:22-34. His encouragement took the approach of redirecting their focus from their own hardship to the glories that would move them to worship.

Paul started the verse with “Finally,” which did not signal the close of the letter as much as it marked the final item in the things to that Paul mentioned that were necessary to stand firm in the Lord. He had already mentioned the reconciliation of Euodia and Syntyche, which would promote unity of the church; ongoing rejoicing; and replacing anxiety with prayer. Paul now turned his attention to what the Philippians allowed to occupy their thoughts.

- ❓ Paul encouraged his readers to focus on what is honorable. How would you describe something that is “honorable”? How would you describe the difference between honorable and dishonorable?
- ❓ When tempted to focus on something dishonorable, how might we replace those thoughts with an honorable focus? How is this related to our use of technology?

By using tremendous rhetorical skill, Paul Christianized, so to speak, the Greek practices. The Philippians would have understood that Paul’s valuation of what was truly excellent and praiseworthy—Jesus Christ and the advancing of His gospel—was infinitely greater than mere Greek moralisms. The implication was that because believers knew Jesus, the true excellence, and the only one that was due praise, then they could stand firm together by fixing their thoughts on the glories of His character and holiness.

- ❓ How does Paul’s instruction to “dwell on these things” lend itself to developing a godly vision for your life?
- ❓ In what way does wrong use of technology lead us to dwell on the wrong things?

Conclusion

- ❓ What have you found to be the most spiritually helpful technological tools? How do you employ them regularly?
- ❓ How do you respond when people default to a negative view of technology? Do you agree or disagree? What examples would you point out to support your view?
- ❓ What are some ways that you have realized that digital connection cannot offer the same as personal relationships? What would be some important steps for balancing the two?






Expanded Session Content

Finding Our Way With Technology (Our Mind)

Introduction

With the exponential rise of the use of technology in every sector of life, the possibility of not being influenced by technology is virtually nonexistent. The marketing industry realizes the broad influence of technology, which is why, for the first time in history, digital ads will surpass conventional advertising (billboards, magazines, newspapers, etc.). While 54.2% of advertising dollars in the U.S. will be for digital ads, perhaps more important is the fact that two-thirds of the funds for digital ads will be for mobile devices.¹ Why? Because technology wields untold influence.

Tragically, however, the influence of technology is not always as menial as the pesky ads between levels of your favorite game. The technology that allows so many loved ones to stay connected halfway across the world also capitalizes on temptations and brokenness in men and women everywhere. For the believer, focusing on that which is life-giving and Christ-affirming is of utmost importance when finding our way with technology.

-  What activity do you spend most of your technological energy on? What does that represent about your priorities? Do you think that it is an accurate reflection?
-  How have you seen your use of technology change over the last year? What is a part of your regular digital menu that was not there a year ago? How has that changed you?
-  What ads do you most vividly remember from your technology use this past week? Where did you see the ad? How does that memory verify the influence technology has, even in casual settings?

Session Summary

In this week's session, Paul directed the believers in Philippi to focus on those things that reflected God's character and holiness. The importance of his direction was found in the numerous distractions the Philippian believers faced: persecution, false religions, false teaching within their

own ranks, and potential division within the church. There was much to distract them from gospel effectiveness. In light of that, Paul directed them to focus on godly things so that they might retain their gospel effectiveness.

1. Think on These Things (Philippians 4:8)

In writing to the Philippian believers, Paul attempted to heal a potential church split that threatened the gospel effectiveness of the Philippian congregation. While the first three chapters included a tremendous amount about joy, love for one another, and selflessly serving one another according to the model of Christ, the fourth and final chapter opened with the explanation for the focus on such topics. Two leading women in the church, Euodia and Syntyche, were in conflict with one another. The topic of the disagreement was not stated, which made sense considering the broad reach the disagreement's implications had on the congregation. For anyone that has suffered through a congregation on the brink of splitting, the problem never needed to be stated as all affected by it were well aware of the conflict's details. Paul, instead, moved toward reconciliation for the sake of the gospel, enlisting the bearer of the letter as an unbiased third-party for the sake of bringing about peace.

The background for the passage was critical for what Paul strongly directed in Philippians 4:8. The opportunities for distraction and discouragement for the Philippian believers were not in short supply. They were oppressed by their countrymen in Philippi. They were ostracized from their families. They battled false teaching in their own midst. Now they battled fractured fellowship in the leadership of their own congregation. In the face of such opposition, it would be natural for any group to turn inward, focus on their plight, and inadvertently lose gospel effectiveness and, worse, their focus on Christ. To that end, Paul encouraged the believers to strongly realign their focus on that which was congruent with God's character.

The entire structure of this verse is a bit strange for Paul in the sense that he used multiple words that are only found here in the entire body of Paul's writings. The structure actually resembles a list of virtues, most commonly found in Greco-Roman wisdom and philosophical writing. Understanding the context to which he was writing, Paul used the customs and culture of the Roman colony of Philippi to encourage the believers that were suffering for their faith. Paul used a similar approach in his sermon at the Areopagus in Athens about the unknown God in Acts 17:22-34. His encouragement took the approach of redirecting their focus from their own hardship to the glories that would move them to worship.

Paul started the verse with “Finally,” which did not signal the close of the letter as much as it marked the final item in the things to that Paul mentioned that were necessary to stand firm in the Lord. He had already mentioned the reconciliation of Euodia and Syntyche, which would promote unity of the church; ongoing rejoicing; and replacing anxiety with prayer. Paul now turned his attention to what the Philippians allowed to occupy their thoughts.

First of all, Paul directed the Philippians to that which was true. The entire list of qualities was based on a sense of moral nobility, so it was logical to start with truthfulness as the foundational quality. Paul’s writing was extremely eloquent at this particular point in this letter, showing both how important he viewed this particular list of practices in Christian discipleship and that he was intentionally borrowing from the practices of Greco-Roman philosophers, who taught by listing catalogs of virtues. In doing so, Paul arrested that which in pagan culture was viewed as virtuous, and elevated them to their greater virtue in Christ. For instance, there was that which was logically truthful according to worldly wisdom, but there was the greater truth that is Christ Jesus himself as communicated through the advance of the gospel. Remember that Paul had been preaching the advancement of the gospel as the most important thing throughout his letter to the Philippians up to this point. To that end, when Paul exhorted them toward whatever is true, he meant both knowing the truth and applying the truth to the way they lived their lives for the glory of God.

Second, Paul directed their attention to whatever was honorable. The use of honorable gives the first instance in Paul’s list where the word in the original language is difficult to define with one English word. The idea behind the word for “honorable” was a majesty, dignity, and awe typically reserved only for sacred or divine things. Therefore, the object in Paul’s mind was something that meant more than noble. Rather, it referred to that which described the character of the holy. Scholar Gerald Hawthorne explains it this way: “Hence, although it may not be possible to translate [it] with a single word, its basic idea is clear. It refers to lofty things, majestic things, things that lift the mind from the cheap and tawdry to that which is noble and good and of moral worth.”² Awe-inspiring is a good understanding of what Paul meant by “honorable.”



Paul encouraged his readers to focus on what is honorable. How would you describe something that is “honorable”? How would you describe the difference between honorable and dishonorable?



When tempted to focus on something dishonorable, how might we replace those thoughts with an honorable focus? How is this related to our use of technology?

Third, Paul directed their attention to whatever was just. There were two dynamics at play here: the person's relationship to God and the person's relationship to other people. When Paul talked about that which is just, it did not merely refer to legal justice. Rather, it referred to justly offering to God that which He is due (all praise, glory and honor, as well as our whole being for His purposes). But it also referred to giving others what they are due, recognizing that they are created by God in His image. That was particularly important because it freed humanity from the "eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth" mentality of being only as kind to someone as they were to the individual. Instead, thinking on that which is just called believers to a higher justice in which serving their fellow man became an act of worship to God.

Fourth, Paul directed their attention to whatever was pure. This usage of pure did not pertain to the idea of chastity that modern culture normally assigns to "pure" in common use. This word for pure had connection with the understanding of worship and the holy. Purity, then, referred to something untainted by evil or ulterior motive. The aspect of ulterior motive hearkened back to Paul's exhortation in chapter two to do nothing out of selfish ambition. So there was strong consideration for purity of motive as it pertained to the way the believer engaged in worship.

Fifth, Paul directed his readers' attention to whatever was lovely. The beauty that Paul set as their aim, however, was not physical in nature. Instead, Paul encouraged them to think on things that called forth love by way of their winsome nature. His desire was that the attention of the Philippians be fixed on that which elicited admiration and affection. However, considering that it was the fifth thing listed, all of the things in Paul's list of virtues that preceded "that which is lovely" described the lovely thing as being able to draw out admiration and affection because of its purity, justice, honor, and truth.

Sixth, Paul directed their attention to whatever is commendable. Neither this word nor the word translated "lovely" immediately before appear anywhere else in the rest of the Bible. They were well beyond the scope of Paul's normal usage. The idea behind the word was to consider those things that were of good repute and, consequently, gave no offense; those things that drew people and did not repel people. So, in the midst of their persecution, they were to stand firm by fixing their attention on how they might give no offense and, instead, offer a way to draw others to

themselves. Bear in mind they were to stand firm in unity, so Paul had in mind the way in which the believers interacted with each other in a spirit of fellowship in unity.

The last two items were actually a part of a conditional phrase – an “if, then” statement. The “if” portion naturally assumed the response was “yes,” which then obligated the reader to follow through with the “then” portion. Paul stated, “if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.” Remember that Paul’s form in this verse mimicked the Greek moralists’ lists of virtues, so clearly there was excellence in the list. By using tremendous rhetorical skill, Paul Christianized, so to speak, the Greek practices. The Philippians would have understood that Paul’s valuation of what was truly excellent and praiseworthy—Jesus Christ and the advancing of His gospel—was infinitely greater than mere Greek moralisms. The implication was that because believers knew Jesus, the true excellence, and the only one that was due praise, then they could stand firm together by fixing their thoughts on the glories of His character and holiness.



How does Paul’s instruction to “dwell on these things” lend itself to developing a godly vision for your life? In what way does wrong use of technology lead us to dwell on the wrong things?

Conclusion

Paul’s direction to the Philippian believers holds multiple points of application for believers seeking a relationship with technology that is God-honoring.

First, believers must be proactive in evaluating the sources that they allow in their minds. There resides, in the wake of the tidal wave of digital material, a passive assumption that a person cannot avoid all of the detrimental offerings that come their way. The best they can do is white-knuckle the experience, praying it doesn’t cling to them. This is a defeatist lie from the enemy. Believers must be vigilant in evaluating the content that fills their minds on a regular basis. The believer must be proactive in evaluating the sources that are allowed to have influence on his or her worldview, decision-making, and daily living.

Second, the believer must be equally proactive in filling his or her mind with life-giving sources. From the movies one views to the podcasts one subscribes to, the believer must actively choose those that draw their attention to Christ. Truthfully, in many scenarios, those options may seem in short supply. The reality is that the supply only seems short in light of the mass of worldly options. If the believer is not careful to take

responsibility for filling his or her mind with things that match Paul's Philippian list, the world will gladly fill in the void. The results then are catastrophic.

Third, believers must engage in biblical community. This may seem like an odd point of application for a lesson on technology, but the lure of technology is the empty promise of a false intimacy. Connection to other believers in biblical community that lifts high the truth of God and seeks to apply it to daily living can actually prevent an over attachment to technology. Biblically, people are wired to enjoy and experience the same kind of community that exists in the Trinity (Genesis 1:26-27). Technology pretends to fill that need, but never can. Biblical community, however, increasingly addresses that desire as relationships mature.

Fourth, have a purpose when using technology. The greatest danger in losing one's way with technology occurs when using technology—especially social media—out of boredom. Technology is an amoral medium, capable of equally being used to help or hinder one's spiritual growth. For that reason, it is possible to thrive technologically when applying technological solutions to real life matters. However, floating around technologically waiting for something to happen or grab one's attention is a recipe for disaster.

- ❓ What have you found to be the most spiritually helpful technological tools? How do you employ them regularly?
- ❓ How do you respond when people default to a negative view of technology? Do you agree or disagree? What examples would you point out to support your view?
- ❓ What are some ways that you have realized that digital connection cannot offer the same as personal relationships? What would be some important steps for balancing the two?

Prayer of Response

Close in prayer asking God to guide you and help you to have a relationship with technology that honors Him. Ask Him to help you fill your mind with whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable for His glory.

Additional Resources

- *12 Ways Your Phone is Changing You* by Tony Reinke
- *The Tech-Wise Family* by Andy Crouch
- *Plugged In* by Dan Strange

For Next Week

Session Title

- Finding Our Way With Technology (Our Time)

Main Passages

- Ephesians 5:15-20

Session Outline

1. Live Wisely (Ephesians 5:15-16)
2. Led by the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:17-18)
3. The Joy of Biblical Community (Ephesians 5:19-20)

Memorize

Finally brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable—if there is any moral excellence and if there is anything praiseworthy—dwell on these things.

-Philippians 4:8

Daily Readings

- Monday - Colossians 4:5
- Tuesday - Psalm 90:12
- Wednesday - James 4:14
- Thursday - Romans 13:11-12
- Friday - 1 Peter 5:8
- Saturday - Colossians 4:2

Extended Commentary

Philippians 4:8

4:8. Continuing his strong imperative style, Paul suggested what should occupy our minds rather than anxiety and worry. Paul understood the influence of one's thoughts on one's life. Right thinking is the first step toward righteous living. What is right thinking? It is thinking devoted to life's higher goods and virtues. Thus Paul picked up a practice from secular writers of his day and listed a catalog of virtues that should occupy the mind. Such virtues are not limited to the Christian community but are recognized even by pagan cultures.

True is that which corresponds to reality. Anxiety comes when false ideas and unreal circumstances occupy the mind instead of truth. Ultimately, thinking on the truth is thinking on Jesus, who is the truth (John 14:6; Eph. 4:21). Noble refers to lofty, majestic, awesome things, things that lift the mind above the world's dirt and scandal. Right refers to that which is fair to all parties involved, that which fulfills all obligations and debts. Thinking right thoughts steers one away from quarrels and dissensions to think of the needs and rights of the other party. Pure casts its net of meaning over all of life from sexual acts to noble thoughts to moral and ritual readiness for worship. Thinking on the pure leads one away from sin and shame and toward God and worship. Lovely is a rare word referring to things that attract, please, and win other people's admiration and affection. Such thoughts bring people together in peace rather than separating them in fighting and feuding. Admirable is something worthy of praise or approval, that which deserves a good reputation. Pondering ways to protect one's moral and spiritual image in the community leads away from worries about circumstances and possessions that project a different image to the community and which thinking cannot change.

The catalog of virtues Paul sums up in two words: excellent and praiseworthy. The first encompasses what is best in every area of life, the philosophical good for which every person should strive. Here it is especially the ethical best a person can achieve. The second term refers to that which deserves human praise. The catalog of virtues thus reflects the best life a person can live and the best reputation a person can thereby achieve in the community.

Finally, in this verse, Paul gets to his point: think on these things. That, joined with prayer will relieve all anxieties and lead one to praise God and live life the way he desires.³

References

1. “US Digital Ad Spending Will Surpass Traditional in 2019.” EMarketer. February 19, 2019. Accessed June 20, 2019. <https://www.emarketer.com/content/us-digital-ad-spending-will-surpass-traditional-in-2019>.
2. Hawthorne, Gerald F. *Philippians*. WBC. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2004.
3. Anders, Max E. *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians & Colossians*. Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 1999.