

# TIP TOEING THROUGH THE TOUGH STUFF

## Lesson Seven: Our Thought Life

### I. "Self Talk"

- A. Some common sources of self talk: Logic, reason, past experiences, misconception and lack of information
- B. "Self Talk" goes awry when we:
  - 1. Focus too much on the past on the future – not on the present. "I should have" or "I must"
  - 2. Focus only on outcomes (not the journey): "I must win"
  - 3. Focus on factors we do not control: "It's going to be a horrible holiday because my mother always..."
  - 4. Demand perfection of ourselves, our children, our marriage, our work performance. "I/we have to be..."
- C. Some classic illustrations of negative thinking (from [www.arthritis.org](http://www.arthritis.org))
  - 1. Polarizing – this is an "all or nothing"/ "black or white" mentality about life or our own performance. We set ourselves (and others) up for failure.
  - 2. Jumping to conclusions: Acting like we read minds or can tell fortunes, we become convinced that a prediction is already an established fact.
  - 3. Magnifying or minimizing: We either exaggerate insignificant events or minimize significant events to place ourselves in the best possible light.
  - 4. Labeling and mislabeling: We generalize things into an inaccurate assumption. We make conclusions off little evidence. Example: "I'm late, I'm a loser", "she is late, she's a loser."
  - 5. Basing facts on emotions: We conclude, "Since I feel this way, it must be true."

6. Personality: We automatically blame ourselves and assume responsibility for things that are not our fault. Example: "If only I was a better wife my husband would not be an alcoholic."
  7. Catastrophizing: We assume the worst in any situation.
- D. Some benefits of a positive thought life: lower stress, better psychological and physical well being, better coping skills, lower rates of depression and an increased life span.
  - E. Changing our "self talk" into something positive, productive and helpful for others.

Paul paints a bull's eye around Phil 4:8

*"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."*

## II. The passage itself

- A. "Finally": means "hence-forth" or "from now on." Paul is drawing a line in the sand.
- B. "Brothers and sisters:" They are members of the same family, people who share the same nature, members of the same Christian community.
- C. Some thoughts about the "List:"

"Paul's list has six items in one series. All six designate the same things. True things are at the same time revered, righteous, pure, etc. So each predicate applies to every item in the list. The indefinite and comprehensive "whatever" includes everything "true," etc. All of these things Paul turns first in one way and then in another and shows them now from this side as being 'true,' now from another as being 'revered,' now from a third as being 'righteous' and so on.

We thus regard this list as being made up of three pairs: true things are revered – as righteous they are pure – as lovely they are of good report. In other words, Paul has a rhetorical three, each of which is a pair. All are thus 'virtue' and as such are also 'praise.' 'Whatever' regards them as a mass; 'anything' considers any and every one singly. All this is typically Pauline rhetorical formulation and worthy of appreciation as such." (Interpretation of Galatians, Ephesians and Philipians by Lenski, p. 881)

1. "True" - It is the sense of something being worthy of reverence. It is honorable. It is the lifestyle of godly living.

2. “Noble” – It has the sense of dignity or holiness upon it. It is dignified. It is often translated “grave” in 1 Tim 3:8,11; Titus 2:2 in reference to church leading.
  3. “Right” – It is the idea of giving God and men what is their due. It’s the sense of “duty faced and duty done.” It is a conformity to God’s character.
  4. “Pure” – It is freedom from defilements or impurities. If something is pure, it is fit to be brought into the presence of God. See 1 John 3:3
  5. “Lovely” – It means to be attractive or winsome; “that which calls forth in love.” It’s the opposite of vengeance or bitterness.
  6. “Admirable” – This is referring to things that are fit to be heard. They are “high toned.” One writer commented, “It is connected with the holy silence at the beginning of a sacrifice in the presence of the gods.”
- D. The grammatical form of this list changes for the last two items. It is a first class, conditional sentence that is assumed to be true. It might be translated “If, and of course it is true...”
1. “Praiseworthy” and “Excellent” – Paul is making a case by omitting any possible appeal. “If there is any mental excellence or moral quality...and of course there are...think on these things”
  2. “Think about such things:” We are told to let our minds be filled with all the six attributes of character and life. It is a deliberate or calculating kind of reasoning that is a priority and goes on continually.

We are to dwell on these things so they can shape our thinking and living.

### III. How we can “keep on thinking about these things”

- A. Identify areas we need to change. Be specific. Choose one area at a time.

Examples: thoughts regarding my husband, my job, this particular child, my own success as an employee etc.

- B. Be aware of how you phrase things.

1. Change negative statements into positive ones

Example: Replace “I am so angry that the car broke down and now we can’t go to \_\_\_\_\_” with “I wonder what God has in store for me today?”

2. Turn self limiting statements into questions.

Example: Replace “I can’t do this” with “How can I do this”

C. Check yourself

1. Periodically through the day stop yourself and evaluate what you are thinking about. It is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent or praise worthy?
2. If not, stop it! Say “stop” out loud.
3. Consider using the “rubber band snap” as a reminder. It is a self imposed slight negative consequence that can help you to stop the tirade of negative thoughts.

D. Do some journaling

Write a summary of your thoughts at the end of the day. Stop and consider each thought/assumption. Were they accurate? Were they helpful? Should they be discarded?

E. Memorize this passage (Phil. 4:4-9)

Often just asking the question: “Is this thing I am stewing over true or pure or lovely?” will cause us to reorient our thought life.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. Which (if any) of the classic forms of negative thinking plague you? Why do you think they are a problem for you?
2. As you consider the list of six attributes of character and life found in this passage, how is your thought life or self talk? What kinds of things trip you up? This week, what can you do about it?
3. Discuss the messages coming from the world (TV, magazines, novels, internet, casual conversation)...how do they match up with our passage and its instruction “to dwell on these things?” What can you do about it?