

- I began a new mini-series of teaching last week entitled: “Never waste a good crisis”
  - We are in a crisis right now with the Coronavirus (which is actually the reason you are watching me over a computer screen) but crises are not unique. We have them whenever we experience something unexpected or something that gets in the way of life. It can be as small a crisis as being behind a driver that is so slow they make us late for something or as large and evastating as a disease or death.
  - Crisis is a common experience. For many, the goal is simply to survive a crisis and return as quickly as possible to some state of normal. But in the effort to get past it they miss crucial opportunities.
  - I wanted to talk about how a crisis can end up being a “good crisis.” Good in the way that when tell the story of our crisis, we can tell a positive story of victory in the midst of trouble and even grief.
  - Every crisis is a chance to move in a positive direction. It is not always easy. It is often time-consuming. It is rarely straight-forward. But it is possible. And it doesn’t happen by accident.
  - Last week we saw that every crisis is an invitation to go deeper. An invitation to wrestle honestly with God because he desires relationship. He knows that often a crisis is necessary to get us from where we are to a better place, so we need to engage in that process during a crisis.
  - This week I want to examine something else that is critical if we are not going to waste a good crisis.
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- It’s what we think about.
  - A fundamental truth about humanity is that we are thought-powered creatures.
  - Our thoughts empower or dishearten us.
  - Our thoughts release or restrict us.
  - Our thoughts spur us towards goals or self-destruction.
  - Psychologists tell us that much of the mental activity people indulge in is counterproductive, and this is exacerbated in crisis.
  - This is because during times of crisis, people don’t think as clearly. Selfish tendencies increase. Feelings of hopelessness or helplessness direct away from processing well. During crisis it is easy to get overwhelmed, panic or just live in denial.
  - The longer a crisis goes on, the more pronounced these effects become.
  - You’ve all experienced this. Your thoughts seem to go more easily to the negative. You are sapped of energy. You find yourself acting irritable and lazy. You find the same problems cropping up in your head time and again. You find yourself overwhelmed to the point you withdraw, shut down or try to numb it all.
  - Whether we waste any particular crisis is inextricably tied to our thoughts. For our purposes this morning, I would say it this way.
  - **How we think determines our response to crisis.**
  - To help us I want to look at a paragraph from a letter that Paul wrote. We find it in what we call the book of Philippians, but this little book is actually a letter that Paul wrote to a church that he started.
  - Paul had visited the city of Philippi years earlier and started a church. After he had left, some problems had crept into the church. Paul heard about them and wrote a letter to help them out. But the tone of the letter is not harsh. It is a joyful letter. The entire letter is an encouraging thank-you for the way the Philippian church had cared for him.
  - The words “joy”, “rejoice” and “glad” all appear multiple times in the letter. The letter is filled with hope. Paul speaks repeatedly about how these followers of Jesus should *think*.

- What's amazing is that this letter, filled with hope and joy, was written by Paul while in prison. In chains. Waiting trial. His execution was probably not very far away.
- He is living in crisis. Life not turning out the way he desired or expected. In the midst of his crisis he wrote words that to this day can inform how also can deal with crisis. Many people can write good things after their crisis is over and they look back with perspective. Paul is still in his crisis when he wrote these words.

*Philippians 4:4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! 5 Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. 6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. 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. 9 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.*

- **How we think determines our response to crisis.**
- In this little paragraph that Paul is writing to finish off his letter, he gives us some words from his personal experience that, to use our words, can help us not waste a good crisis.

## I. How you feel doesn't need to drive what you think about.

- The crisis you face, whether something small, immediate and temporary, or the long, never ending, no light on the horizon kind, does not determine what you think about.
- The instruction is to:

*4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!*

- The command to rejoice is repeated – which was a way of emphasizing something in ancient writings. It's like a text response in all caps with emoji's and exclamation marks.
- The instruction is about a deliberate choice, not an emotion. He does not command them to be happy, but to rejoice.
- To rejoice is to take delight in. It can't be to take delight in the crisis itself. No one takes delight in prison, sickness, death or a long term quarantine.
- Paul is talking about an action based on a state of mind. To choose, despite the circumstances, to see that there are things to rejoice and be glad about.
- Not only that, he uses the key word "always." This means to rejoice whether you are in a deep crisis (like writing a letter from prison) or not, rejoice.
- In the midst of crisis, we mostly don't *feel* like rejoicing.
- Paul is making an important point. What we think about and what we feel are not necessarily the same. Even when we feel terrible and things are in a crazy crisis, we can choose to take delight in things, even if they are the smallest things.
- This does not mean we ignore the problems and the feelings from our crisis. They are real and they are legitimate. But it does mean that how we feel does not need to dictate everything going on in our minds.
- **How we think determines our response to crisis.** How we feel does not need to dictate what we think about. This means we must:

## II. Pay attention to what thoughts predominate.

- You must be aware of what you are thinking about? What is always at the very front of your brain? What takes only the smallest trigger to bring it back to the top.
- Paul continues . . .

*6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.*

- Do not be anxious. Don't worry. This sounds an awful lot like what Jesus said.
- *Don't be anxious.* Be conscious of what you think about.
- 1) Not every thought we have originates with us.
- Some thoughts come from other people. Some thoughts are spurred by what we read on Facebook or hear in the news. Honestly, for some of you, during this pandemic, you should minimize the time you spend watching news, reading articles or on social media.
- Some thoughts are a product of our environment like where we work or live. And some whispered thoughts are demonic.
- When we are in crisis, we must pay particular attention to the narrative that we are hearing or seeing.
- Worry and anxiousness are patterns of *thinking*.
- If anyone had a reason to be anxious, it was Paul. He had been arrested. He was in prison. People wanted him executed.
- Yet he uses another key word here. *Don't be anxious about ANYTHING!*
- Instead, he tells them, in every situation, good or bad, in the midst of crisis or not, should trigger us to recognize our thoughts and take them to God.
- 2) Let those thoughts spur you to recalibrate your thinking.
- Don't worry. Don't be anxious. Know all those thoughts crowding into your brain and let those thoughts recalibrate towards God and not away from him.
- How do you recalibrate? Take all those thoughts and worries to God in a spirit of thankfulness.
- Thankfulness keeps us from becoming prayer-worriers instead of prayer-warriors. When thankfulness is absent, often our prayer times are less about talking to God and more about talking to ourselves.
- **How we think determines our response to crisis.**
- We don't want to waste any crisis. So first, know that what you are feeling in the crisis is perfectly legitimate but it doesn't have to dictate how you think, Second, pay attention then to what you are thinking about so that you can begin to recalibrate by taking your crisis to God. But if we're NOT to be anxious in our thinking, what should our thinking look like.

### III. Choose what you think about.

*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.*

- We could talk about the details of this instruction for a long time. Today, I want to focus on the bigger picture. Paul is telling his friends what to think about. Do you realize the implication?
- We have the power to choose what we think about.
- You, alone, decide what you will think about.
- We decide what thoughts we will allow to roam around in our hearts, and it would be better if we chose thoughts from this list.
- True – opposite of the unreliable dishonest, what we know to be true. There is a lot of half-truth and untruth floating around you.
- Noble – worthy of respect, dignified, things that lift up. Instead of the vitriol, attacking, negativity around us.
- Right – in conformity with God's standards.
- Pure – wholesome. Many people run to escapism, bad habits, dwelling on that which is damaging.

- Lovely – promotes peace rather than conflict. Not a description of most of what we see or hear.
  - Admirable – positive and constructive rather than negative and destructive.
  - These collectively are excellent and praiseworthy.
  - This is not an exhaustive list, but in any crisis, large or small, this shows the direction we need to put our thoughts.
  - Let me make three quick observations.
  - One, be intentional about which thoughts you let linger in your mind.
  - “Are you saying Weldon we are just supposed to think happy thoughts and pretend this crisis isn’t killing me?” That’s not what I’m saying. Please understand me. You get to wrestle with God through any crisis.
  - But thoughts will regularly pop into your head throughout the day that you should not allow to stay. You need to know that not every thought you think should be allowed to hang around.
  - Some of you feel guilty every time you think something unhelpful. This is not about guilt. When a thought that doesn’t conform to this list enters your mind, recognize it and then choose to think about something else.
  - Two, focus more on what you should think about than what you should stop thinking about. That’s why Paul doesn’t just say, “Stop worrying. Don’t be anxious.” By itself, that’s not helpful. It’s like that old joke about telling someone over and over to stop thinking about a pink elephant and soon it’s all you can think about.
  - We are to go to God and begin to replace harmful thoughts with good thoughts.
  - Three, know that your most important thoughts are your thoughts about God
  - Paul’s instructions are not just to be a positive thinker.
  - How we view God will largely dictate how we handle our crisis.
  - Our view of God is a launching pad for many other thoughts and beliefs.
  - Nothing threatens that view of God more than crisis, especially when unanswered prayer are a huge part of that crisis.
  - When that song that you used to sing with faith and ease is now irritating.
  - When the bible, which you used to read with hope feels hollow and hurtful, like sandpaper to your soul.
  - When your prayers, when you do pray, have been reduced to complaints and whimpers.
  - That’s when you need to be very deliberate about your thoughts, particularly your thoughts about God.
- The way we handle our thought life is a fundamental determinant of our emotional health and spiritual growth.
  - What have you been thinking about this past week? What got you anxious, angry or frustrated? How did you retreat and hide from thinking at all? What did your prayers (if you had any) sound like?
  - There is a payoff here for you in the midst of your crisis. Paul puts two little thoughts into this paragraph that are supremely important.
  - Sandwiched right between his instructions to not be anxious and to set their minds on good things, he says this:
 

*7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*
  - As you realize your feelings do not dictate your thoughts and you understand the thoughts that are bombarding you, and you allow those thoughts to direct you to God and begin to intentionally replace them with God thoughts, something happens.

- You get increased access to God's peace.
- Paul is actually living the very thing that he is writing. To have peace in prison awaiting sentencing would be very difficult. As we direct our thoughts towards God and towards the good, his peace starts to permeate our crisis situation. It doesn't necessarily change what we're facing, but it changes our response. And that changes everything.
- Then Paul says one other thing.  
*9 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.*
- Hey friends, all these things I'm telling you, that I do myself, practice them. Keep trying it. Don't stop. Don't get discouraged. Go after your thoughts. Think about what is good. Practice thankfulness as you wrestle with God. The God who gives peace will be right there with you.
- My friends, **how you think determines your response to crisis.** The story you tell at the end of your crisis will be directly tied to your thought life. Pay attention to your feelings and thoughts and choose to think about what is excellent and praiseworthy this week.