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## CHRISTIANS THINK NUTRITIOUSLY

Philippians: Bringing Joy Home  
*Philippians 4:8-23*

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, we thank you very much for the privilege we have to study your word and we ask that you would be honored today as we look at your word. Teach us some new things about how to think and how to respond to you in ways that are most appropriate. We ask for your guidance as we look at your word and open it today. In Jesus' name, amen.

Last week in our passage we were looking at Philippians 4:6-7. They're verses that we've been memorizing together and I would like us to look at those verses again as we go into verse 8 today because they will give us some context of what's happening. In Philippians 4:6-7 we have emotions talked about, we have this idea of peace and how God guards our hearts and minds. We just need to see all of that before we move to verse 8. Let me read Philippians 4:6-7.

*Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.* Notice *hearts and minds* he's talking about.

We're going to talk today about the specific part of the mind as we move forward because that's what Paul is going to talk about in verse 8. Every one of us has this amazing machine inside of our heads we call the brain. Even if a person doesn't have a high IQ or maybe only average or below average intelligence, the brain is still amazing. Did you know that inside the skull of your head is more information stored than in the Library of Congress and all seventeen million volumes? That's pretty amazing for a little machine that only weighs about three pounds.

Each person has a hundred billion neurons inside the head and one trillion synapses, that's the space between the nerve endings. Those are big numbers even if you don't work for the U.S. government.

Here's how the brain works. Synapses, that is the space between the neurons, receives a chemical message and then passes that along to the neuron. It fires along the neuron to the other end with an electrical charge where it meets another neuron, but there's a synapses in between that gets a chemical charge or a chemical transaction to pass that message on to the next neuron. So it goes neuron to synapses to neuron and so on, passing along inside of the brain.

Each thought that we have is made of a bunch of those transactions that are inside the brain. Thoughts are measurable and they occupy mental real-estate. When you remember where you were on September 11<sup>th</sup>, for example, then the control part of your brain goes and finds that

memory and it fires up all those electrochemical charges in that area of the brain in order to remember that memory. And so it pulls it back into short term memory so you can look at it and evaluate it.

Memories are most often attached to emotions. And those are either positive or negative. So toxic thoughts are thoughts that trigger negative or anxious emotions; talked about in Philippians 4:6 – *Do not be anxious about anything*. They produce biochemicals that cause the body stress on the inside. Those are stored in your mind as well in the cells of your body.

Remember we talked last week about Christians respond to stress differently, which means that they handle this whole process in a different way than non-Christians do because we know that the stress that comes on the outside of our world comes at us in all kinds of different directions. But that's not what kills us. It's the internal response to those external stimuli that create the problem for us. The interesting thing is that you can change the connections between the emotions in the brain and the memories.

You have memories that spark emotions of certain kinds. You can change them with your beliefs. Beliefs can break those connections and attach them to new emotions. That's powerful. But it takes work. It takes practice to retrain your brain to do what it needs to do. Thoughts are basically electrical impulses, chemicals, and neurons. They look like a tree with branches. As the thoughts grow and become permanent, more branches grow and connect and the connections become stronger. That's what we're saying here as we look at the brain.

Now Paul is going to talk to us specifically in verse 8 about the brain and how to think. Verse 8 says this: *Finally, brothers, 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*. He's talking about thinking about things that are very positive things. Eight words to describe good ways of thinking. Let me just talk to you about how the brain works.

There are five senses that we all know about: touch, taste, smell, hearing, and seeing. But because we're Christians we know there's another, a sixth sense, a spiritual sense that's giving us input. So when God speaks to us in our hearts it doesn't come through those other five senses; God is giving us a message on the inside. We know that there are six senses here and they produce things inside of our short-term memory.

We're gathering information. That information goes into our short-term memory and much of it, frankly, is lost. You try to remember somebody's name, but then you forget it. It's gone. Or I can remember the flight number that I was on yesterday and I remember for a little while, but then I'm going to lose that. I guess I've already lost it. I don't remember what the flight number was for my flight yesterday. I knew it yesterday as I was traveling, but I don't know it today. That's short-term memory. We lose things out of short-term memory.

But some of those things we want to go into our long-term memory. If I want to remember your name, I want to put it into long-term memory and I want to keep it there so I can remember it next week. Inside of our long-term memory are other things besides just the names of people or the memories that we have that are short-term. There are combinations of things like beliefs and

convictions, dreams and hopes that we have. Scripture is hopefully inside of your long-term memory. And when that takes place, these memories are stored and even affected by those other things that are in long-term memory.

Now if we want to change long-term memory – let’s imagine that you’ve been hurt in your life and you’ve got some painful experience that elicits these negative emotions in your mind and you want to change those because you know they are unproductive and they’re hindering your progress forward. You’re going to bring those memories outside of long-term memory, back into short-term memory, and you’re going to rework them. You’re going to rework them and attach a belief out of your memory now to that negative memory and you’re going to send it back in. Because the beliefs, especially the beliefs that are based on God’s word, have the ability to change the memory, send it back into the long-term memory with a new emotion so you can respond differently. That’s pretty powerful.

Of course you can go the other way. You can bring the memory out of long-term memory and you can bring it into short-term memory and stew about it. “Oh I was really hurt. That person was really unfair. That was the wrong thing to do,” and you stew and stew and stew. It solidifies all those neurons and chemical electro charges in the brain to make that memory more permanent.

What you want to do is bring the memory out, work it through, attach it to beliefs, and send it back in. That’s what we’re saying here. What happens in your long-term memory is that then results in things like attitudes that we have toward life or actions that we develop or decisions that we make. All of those things are what we talk about when we talk about the brain and how it works.

Now Paul uses the word *think about such things*. When he says *think about such things*, we’re talking about processing the things that are going on inside of memory and in the brain. Godliness starts in the heart with a commitment to Jesus Christ, then it changes what we believe. Our thinking changes.

Christians think nutritiously. That’s how they can end up with joy in their hearts. Remember joy is the whole theme of Paul’s message in the book of Philippians. He’s drawing that out and now he’s showing us how we can experience joy in our hearts. We’re going to process our memories in a way that is significant and it’s godly. How you think is going to affect your Christian life. You must confront, inside of your heart, things like rage or anger or unforgiveness or hatred or other forms of toxic thinking. You have a medical need to forgive others and you also must forgive yourself.

When he says in that passage *think about such things*, the Greek words literally mean “continually take inventory of these things.” If you find that there’s some problem going on in your life and you’re continually bothered by past memories that are affecting your future, then you want to take inventory. You want to pull them out into short-term memory, attach them to some positive belief, and send them back in a way that’s more productive so that you can be more productive in your life. It starts with that work that you do in the brain. Detoxifying your thoughts can be like taking a book off of the shelf of your memory bank. Taking it out of short-

term memory, rewriting parts of the book, and sticking them back on the shelf. That's what we're talking about there because you're going to free that thought or that book from negativity that used to be there.

Let me show you some other passages in the scripture that illustrates this very thing. Ephesians 4:31 says, *Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.* Get rid of them. How do you get rid of those things? You can bring the thoughts or the memories back into short-term memory, rework them with godly thinking, and send them back in the right way.

I think some people get stuck sometimes. They don't think about what is true and noble, they think about revenge that's dominated by anger. Or they think about "what-ifs" because they're dominated by worry. Paul is saying Christians think nutritiously.

Modern medicine, finally, confirms what God knew all along. What we think affects how we feel and how we feel affects how we live. If you're going to have joy in your life then you want to think nutritiously. When you start thinking that way, it changes who you are. That's what Paul is describing. Your thinking patterns affect your emotions and your actions.

In these verses that we're studying, Paul emphasizes the need for a good thought life. The Christian life is more than just externals. We're not just talking about a list of rules, doing the dos and avoiding the don'ts. We're talking about something much more internal that develops inside of us than obeying a set of rules. Christianity is about the internals. It's about your thought life. We must transform that thought life to conform to what God wants for us.

I think it's best to say it this way: many of us need a revival of the mind. We need God to come in and cleanse us, clean us up, do that work that's necessary to change who we are. The Bible speaks of this kind of transformation in a person's life. It will transform your Christian life if you can keep your thoughts on things that are pleasing to God.

Let me show you some other verses that Paul uses when he writes to others that I think can confirm what Paul is saying in this passage. In Romans 12:2 he says, *Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.* That's exactly what we're talking about, renewing your mind. We're going to talk about taking those thoughts that are in long-term memory, bringing them into short-term memory, tying them together with beliefs, and sending them back in a way that's most productive.

2 Corinthians 10:5 is another verse that's helpful. *We take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.* Imagine that there is a guard at the gatepost between short-term and long-term memory saying, "That thought, you come over here. You need to be attached to this belief and you may not proceed until this belief is with you all throughout the long-term memory." Take every thought captive, every one of them, so the thoughts then are now being accompanied by beliefs in order to keep them on the right track to protect our minds. And that's what God is trying to help us understand in this whole passage in Philippians 4.

Each of us has our own battle to fight. How do you change your mind? Psalm 1 says this: “Blessed is the man who delights in God’s law. He meditates on it day and night.” We need to memorize scripture so that when those times come when our minds are dragged away from things that aren’t pleasing to God, then we can focus on the scriptures. We have them in our minds, we can work on them. They’re there.

Just remember, how did Jesus fight the temptations when he was in the wilderness? Do you remember that? He used scripture to do that. That was his weapon as he was facing the challenges that Satan was throwing at him. He used scripture that he had memorized. If we want to keep our minds pure, we’re going to need to memorize scripture. I think it’s strategic in what we do.

Let’s go on to verse 9. *Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice.* Four things there. You’ve *learned* or *received* or *heard* or *seen* in me. *Put them into practice and the God of peace will be with you.*

I want you to see that it’s not just a thinking thing that we’re doing, but it’s a behaving thing that we’re putting into practice. We’re doing it. Practice in this verse means to perform repeatedly or habitually. Because when you do the same pattern over and over again you’re building new pathways in the brain, neuron patterns in the brain, that are going to change and you’re going to think differently. If you’re going to change then it’s going to take some practice. New way to think, new ways to act.

Just think; when you first wake up in the morning, do you say to yourself, “Good morning, Lord!” or do you say, “Good Lord. It’s morning.” What do you say?

Some people have toxic thinking like pride and anger and negativity and ungratefulness that needs to be changed. Other people have some serious patterns of thinking that result in things like compulsive gambling or a critical spirit or viewing pornography. Paul says, *Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me.* In other words, I’ve taught you a lot of things. One of the things is God wants you to rejoice always, then it’s going to take some rethinking. You want to practice it and watch what happens.

When you put it into practice then you really do forgive that person. You believe that God will answer your prayers. You stop worrying about things you can’t control. You confess your weaknesses instead of defending or rationalizing them. You stop talking negatively. That takes practice and it starts to build new pathways, new patterns. The Bible talks of tendencies of the heart. We want to be careful about those things.

And what is the result? In the passage what does it say in verse 9? *The God of peace will be with you.* Now we already talked, back in verse 7, about the peace of God guarding your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. The peace of God. But this is the *God of peace.*

I really like the story from the Old Testament in Judges 6:22-24. In that passage, Gideon sees the angel of the Lord and because he saw the angel of the Lord he was convinced he was going to die. Let’s look at the passage. Judges 6:22-24: *When Gideon realized that it was the angel of the*

*Lord, he exclaimed, "Ah, Sovereign Lord! I have seen the angel of the Lord face to face!" But the Lord said to him, "Peace!" That's the word we're looking at here. "Peace! Do not be afraid. You are not going to die."*

It's the peace that helps us overcome the anger or the guilt or the disappointment that we have in our life. God wants to give us that peace inside of our hearts. Verse 24 says, *So Gideon built an altar to the LORD there and called it The LORD is Peace.* It's the God of peace who comes into our lives, who helps us deal with the struggles.

You cannot control your environment all the time. You can control how it will affect your heart and your mind. Both are mentioned in this passage. *Guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.* God wants to do that inside of our lives and it requires that we turn ourselves over to Him and allow Him to work in our lives. It's like the God of peace just pours right over our hearts and our lives and He gives us that peace that we need on the inside.

Do you have that peace? When you have that peace then you can rejoice always. If you don't have that peace, you're going to struggle because you'll be struggling with anger or you'll be struggling with guilt. Every one of those memories need to be pulled out of long-term memory, tied to a belief, and sent back in to respond in a positive way. That's what Paul's trying to help us understand.

But let's go to verse 10. Paul goes back to his theme where he says, *I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me.* You see, the Philippians had given Paul a financial gift and he's acknowledging that here. He says, *Indeed, you have been concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. I am not saying this because I am in need.* Paul's first going to reflect on himself and then he's going to reflect on them in just a little bit.

*I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.* So Paul is going to talk to us now about how he's able to rejoice in the Lord always. One of those is that he has this contentment, this internal peace that allows him to continue on in life. I like that word, contentment. Verse 12: *I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.*

Then comes verse 13. *I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.* I think that last verse is there for people who say, "Oh I can't do this. You would not believe how much I've been hurt in my life. You would not believe how long I've been thinking these negative thoughts and what this problem is for me." You just need to know that that verse 13 there is for you. You're right. You cannot do it yourself, but you can do everything through Him who gives you strength.

Notice the combination of the work that we do, that we think about good things, and we rely on the God who gives us strength to accomplish this task. The key word I think in this passage is 'content.' The word 'content' is helpful because it talks about that internal satisfaction. God wants us to be satisfied people. We shouldn't be restless and jealous, always chaffing about what

we don't have. There should be the spirit of thankfulness in us that brands us or marks us as belonging to God.

Do you remember in Psalm 23, that psalm that many of us know, it says, *The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want*. That means I shall not be longing for something because I'm satisfied by the shepherd. That's the message that's being taught here for us. And Paul is saying that's one of his keys to success; that he's able to be content in any and every situation. That contentment that he has is tied to all his memories that he has. Keep throwing them back in there.

I have a job to do and that is to be *content in any situation, whether to be well fed or hungry, whether to be in plenty or in want*. Paul is describing what happens inside of his heart, gives us a picture of that. It's something that we need to do so we can also experience some of the rejoicing that Paul's talking about when he describes this to the Philippians.

Well, the Philippians gave a gift to Paul through Epaphroditus, the messenger, and Paul now wants to address their financial gift. In this passage we're not just going to learn about the financial gift that was given to Paul, we're going to learn about our giving. In fact there are four things that we're going to see in these next few verses about these gifts that we give to the Lord, our financial gifts.

Number one: It will bless others.

Number two: It gets credited to our account.

Number three: It's pleasing to God.

Number four: It meets needs.

Now let me go through the passage and show you where those four things are demonstrated because it helps us understand our own financial giving and the benefits it has for us personally as well as for other people.

Verse 14: *Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need.* Number one, he is saying your gift blessed me. And that's true for all of us. When we give to the work of the Lord, it blesses other people. When you're giving to the church, sometimes giving to a person, that helps that person get blessed. Sometimes you're helping pay the rent for the building. You're blessing people and that's part of the benefit of the gifts that we give to the Lord.

Number two: It's credited to your account. Look at verse 17. *Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account.* I think he's saying it's not so much that I need your gift, but you need to give it. And I think that's certainly true in our giving financially. That certainly the church needs the money to keep running, but it's not so much the meeting of the needs of the church than it's meeting our internal need to give. We give because there are a

lot of benefits that happen inside of us. One of those is it's credited to this account. I don't know where this account is; all I know is that God has an account and that account is credited based on our generosity and our willingness to give. That's what he's saying there. *It's credited to your account.* But when we give, it gives a little bit of our selfishness away. It does something inside of us when we respond to the Lord in that giving kind of way. That's number two. It's credited to your account.

Let's go to verse 18. *I have received full payment and even more; I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent.* Number three: It meets needs. Giving meets the needs that are out there. The book of Philippians is a thank you note. Paul received a financial gift from the church and now he's thanking them. And so we get to see the thank you note as he's written it.

We continue on in verse 18. These financial gifts you gave *are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God.* He's saying that our gifts that we give financially are pleasing to God. That's powerful. As we think about our finances we want to keep in mind what God is doing inside of us; how He's working, what He's doing in order to help us grow and develop in our lives. The giving that we do is strategic. It's a part of our spirituality and God uses it in some significant ways.

Now let's go to verse 19. *And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.* God's not a genie in a lamp in which we rub whenever we want something, but He loves to meet our needs. And He doesn't limit us to three wishes, but all our needs. Notice that. *He will meet **all** your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.*

Let me show you some other verse about giving that might provoke your thinking in this particular way. Proverbs 3:9-10 says, *Honor the Lord with your wealth, then your barns will be filled to overflowing.*

Malachi 3:10 says, *Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.*

One more verse. 2 Corinthians 9:6 says, *Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.*

Now I'm not suggesting that when we give to the Lord's work He's going to make us rich people. What we're saying though is that He promises to give us what we need. He'll take care of our needs. Someone said it well this way. "It's not what you do with the million if fortunes should be your lot, but what are you doing in present with the dollar and quarter you got." I think that's valuable for our own lives; to ponder what we're doing financially as part of our spirituality and our relationship with the Lord. Verse 19 says, *And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.*

Then he concludes this section by saying, *To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.* Let's finish the rest of the passage here and then I'll make some concluding remarks.

Verse 21 starts with some greetings as he's giving the final greetings to the people who are there. *Greet all the saints in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me send greetings. All the saints send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar's household.* Obviously Paul had an impact now on the people inside of Caesar's household, maybe through the guards who were with him who transferred over and were guarding the palace. They were hearing about this and some of them were coming to Christ. It's a powerful work that Paul was doing. And the final verse, verse 23: *The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.*

This is the last of our studies in the book of Philippians. I just want to review with you where we've been over the last seven weeks as we've looked at the book of Philippians.

In week number one we talked about the joy that we have in the struggle of life. The key verse we looked at was Philippians 1:3 which says, *I thank my God every time I remember you.* Philippians 1:3. We're in this struggle that the Lord allows us to work through and benefits come in the midst of that.

The second week we talked about how we are works in progress. The key verse was Philippians 1:6. *Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.* We are works in process and we must understand that as we're growing in our lives so we can forgive ourselves when we make mistakes and we can forgive others as well. We are works in progress.

In week number three we talked about the importance of attitude. The key verse in Philippians 2:5 was *Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.*

In week four we said Christians don't complain and our key verse was Philippians 2:14. *Do everything without complaining or arguing.*

The fifth week we talked about the most important thing. What is the most important thing in your life? Philippians 3:8 was our key verse and it says this: *I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.* If you're here today and you've never accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior then that is the most important thing that you want to start with. You don't start by changing your mind, you start by asking Jesus to come into your life because He comes in and He starts to cleanse, He starts to do that deeper work inside. That is the most important thing.

Last week, week six, we talked about Christians handle stress differently. Our key verse was Philippians 3:20. *Our citizenship is in heaven.*

And then this week we're talking about how Christians think nutritiously and our key verse is Philippians 4:8. *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.*

Seven weeks in the book of Philippians and I hope it makes an impact on your heart, it changes how you feel and how you act. Paul has given us a lot of success principles that will help us know how to respond. We want to take Jesus home.

When I say, “Take Jesus home,” I’m not just referring to your family. For some of you, family isn’t where you are right now when you say, “Take Jesus home.” Now some of you are working with family and so you take this home as a student and you’re working it out with your parents and others in your home. But some of you are living in a dorm room or some of you are single. When we say, “Take Jesus home,” we’re talking about bringing Jesus into every area of your life. Taking Jesus into your heart and then taking it out of here and working it out in your workplace. Taking your faith wherever you are into your neighborhood, into your house. Into the relationships you have with roommates or into the classroom at school. Taking Jesus home is more than just about family. It’s practically living out the Christian faith. It’s very important for us not to just listen to something, but to go and actually do it.

That’s why God gave us the Bible. So we can know Him more and serve Him better wherever we find ourselves. I encourage you to take with you into your home, whatever it looks like, that you take Jesus there. Take this message of Philippians; apply it to your life: Rejoice always. It’s the way we were designed. Let’s look for ways to take Jesus home.

Let’s pray together.

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, I ask that you give us wisdom, each one of us, to know how to apply these truths. Lord, some of us are pretty tangled up sometimes and really need some help working all this out. So I ask, Lord, that you would use us as a church to strengthen each other and grow in this very important area of our lives so we can be more like you. We ask this in Jesus’ name, amen.