

Week 4: Train your Brain



Last week, we looked at how we can effectively close the gap between who we are and who others *think* we are. This week, we focus on some of the ways that we can walk in the ongoing goodness of being 'hidden with Christ in God', and how to sustain some of our new enthusiasm for change.

1. Accurate Expectations and Gracious Responses To Failure

- Read Philippians 4:2-3

We should pay attention to the fact that, in such a public letter to the church, Paul chose to interject, and focus on the relational discord between two of his faithful gospel workers. Both of these women were failing in this area, and Paul felt it necessary to address their sin publically, while in the same breath reminding them of their incredible value in Christ, and in the work of the gospel. Relational brokenness in the church was a major concern for Paul, and it should be for us as well. The longer we indulge in relational strife, the longer we will take to close the delta in our lives. Even the most faithful Christians will fail God at some level, and so it is important to know that, when we do fail, we must turn from our sin quickly, while being fully dependent on God's grace. And in relying on God's grace to forgive and restore us, we are able to extend the same grace to others who sin against us.

- ❖ Q: How do you think the two women, mentioned for relational brokenness, would have felt when they heard the letter read out at their church?
- ❖ Q: Why do you think Paul chose to put this into his letter, rather than addressing them individually?
- ❖ Q: Though Paul was clearly drawing sharp focus onto relational sin, what else was he trying to teach them at the same time?
- ❖ Q: How would this passage help people in our church community who are in relational strife at the moment? Think through what your relationships in our community are like.
- ❖ Q for Personal Reflection: Are you in discord with anyone, and how is God using this passage to prompt change in that relationship?

2. Prayerful Dependence

- Read Philippians 4:4-7, 1 Peter 5:6-7, Matthew 6:25-34

After dealing with the external battles in the church, Paul then turned to the internal battle of anxiety. The New Testament is full of passages that teach us that worry (imagining the worst about a future that has not even happened yet) is a sin, a waste of time and a drain on our energy. In essence, anxiety assumes the worst about God and about His intentions for our lives. In being anxious, we are admitting that we have very little control over our lives, but at the same time, anxiety reveals our refusal to 'allow' God to be in control, probably because at a deeper level, we fear His decisions and the subsequent outcomes, and feel that if we were in charge, we would do a better job.

At the root of our anxiety as Christians, is a lack of faith in who God says He is. In other words, it is unbelief or faithlessness. For many of us, this reveals that our theology (what we know *about* God) does not match our internal beliefs *in* God. Some of us know that we struggle for our knowledge of God to really penetrate our hearts, and that this is a real issue that we need help in overcoming. We long to not be anxious, and to let go and trust God fully, and yet we feel overwhelmed.

In this passage, Paul gives us 3 tools to help us in our fight against anxiety – prayer, supplication (requests/petitions) and thanksgiving, which help us to focus on God, rather than on our own lack.

- ❖ Q: What is anxiety?
- ❖ Q: What are you most anxious about generally?
- ❖ Q: Why is worry incompatible with faith?
- ❖ Q: Why do you think prayer is the first weapon in our fight against anxiety?
- ❖ Q: Why is thanksgiving to God important in the process of overcoming anxiety?
- ❖ Q: In what ways can we as a GC help/support someone in our group who is overwhelmed by anxiety?

Closing the gap between who we are, who we pretend to be, and who God designed us to be



3. New Ways Of Thinking

- Read Philippians 4:8, Isaiah 26:3, Romans 12:12

Paul wanted the Philippians intentionally to think differently, because they were Christians who were 'hidden with Christ in God'. He understood that just trying to stop wrong thinking without replacing those thoughts with right thinking, would never bring about any real change, because our minds cannot remain in 'neutral'. What we think about is our own choice, and most of us need to start *choosing* what we think about, instead of continuing to allow our anxious thoughts to run riot.

Knowing that the Philippians would need some help in what kind of thoughts to choose, Paul gave them a list to work from. This list also helps us to renew our thought-lives, and start producing the kind of thinking that is consistent with being 'hidden with Christ in God'. If we are going to close the delta in our lives, we are going to have to change the way we think, and we can start that today!

Paul's list of godly thoughts:

- True: Ask yourself if these thoughts are true about God.
 - Honorable: Ask yourself whether these thoughts are worthy of imitation by others, whether they are thoughts that others would aspire to.
 - Just: Ask yourself if what you are thinking about is right, and if it reflects God's justice.
 - Pure: Ask yourself if these thoughts are morally excellent, pure and innocent – the opposite of filth and shame.
 - Lovely: Ask yourself if what you thinking about is worthy of praise, and if it inspires worship.
 - Commendable: Ask yourself if this kind of thinking would cause the world to applaud, because it is so valuable.
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- ❖ Q: How much time do you spend thinking about things over which you have little or no control? What impact does that have on your time, energy and experience?
 - ❖ Q: Why does Paul want us to choose our thoughts carefully, and not just allow anxiety to prevail?
 - ❖ Q: If someone could see inside your head, would they want to think how you think?
 - ❖ Q: In light of the above question, which thoughts on Paul's list do you need to focus on, because you are not thinking rightly?
 - ❖ Q: Is there any way that we as a GC could help one another in the process of learning to think in a godly way?

4. Faith That Works

- Read Philippians 4:9, 1 Thessalonians 2:13, James 1:22-25

Paul wanted the Philippians to start living out what they had been taught.

It is not enough to just learn what the scriptures say, or to know what they mean for us we need to put what we learn into practice. This is what it means to have real faith.

- ❖ Q: Why are we deceiving ourselves if we do not put what we have learned about our thought-lives (from this message) into practice?
- ❖ Q: What do you think the results will be if we all leave here and begin immediately to take responsibility for our thinking, and start to think in a godly way, as the result of being convicted and moved to believe truly in God's word?

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