

# Think and Act; Feelings Follow

*From Philippians*

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**Bible Text:** Philippians 4:8-9

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I direct your attention to Philippians four verses eight and nine.

Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.<sup>1</sup>

The alarm rings. You hit the snooze button. You say, “I really don’t feel like getting up this morning.” And so you roll over. You are late for work. It doesn’t feel very good.

If you are in school and you go through the same procedure and you are late for class it doesn’t feel good, does it?

And if you are a youngster, perhaps your mom or dad says, “Will you please straighten up your room?” And you say, “I don’t feel like it.” You go on to do something else and the consequences follow. You don’t feel good.

Yes, we understand that bad feelings follow poor decisions. What is the solution? The solution is to do that which is right and proper. And after you have accomplished the task at hand, you will feel differently. This is actually what the apostle Paul teaches you and me this morning in our text. If you think on those things which are good and you practice those things which are good, in the end, you will feel good. Feelings follow. But we get the cart before the horse. We too often act on our feelings rather than understanding that good actions precipitate good feelings.

And so we look at this text this morning with this idea in view, Philippians chapter four and verses eight and nine. If you think on that which is good and practice that which is good, in the end the apostle Paul tells us—Jesus Christ tells you—you will feel good.

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<sup>1</sup> Philippians 4:8-9.

The apostle gives us this text—or I should say, rather—Jesus Christ gives us this text as a means of instruction. It is instruction for the likes of you and me, Christian people. Look again at verse eight.

“Finally, brethren...”<sup>2</sup> So the apostle Paul begins. The apostle is speaking to Christian brothers and sisters, those whom he understands are brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ. He begins the fourth chapter in this way. “Therefore, my beloved brethren.”<sup>3</sup> And certainly he begins the book itself this way.

Look back at verses one and two of Philippians one.

Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>4</sup>

You see very plainly the apostle is speaking to the Church at Philippi, calling these people saints, that is, those who are set aside by the gospel to the service of God. And the apostle is not only speaking *to* fellow Christians, but he is also speaking *on behalf of* Jesus Christ. Verse two indicates this is the case. “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>5</sup>

“Grace to you and peace.”<sup>6</sup> Paul is not giving you this grace and peace. I am not able to give you this grace and peace. God the Father gives you this grace and peace and Jesus Christ gives you this grace and peace. Paul is writing in the name of Jesus Christ. And, you know, if you properly understand the doctrine of the inspiration of the Bible, that in the end these words which we are reading in Philippians chapter four are not only the words of the apostle Paul, these are the words of the Savior. And so Christ, Jesus Christ, is coming to you this morning with this instruction.

And as Christ comes to you this morning with this instruction from Philippians four, he lays before you an example, a model, to follow. And the model happens to be this man, the apostle Paul. Look with me at verse nine if you would. “The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me...”<sup>7</sup> says the apostle. You have to catch the little prepositional phrase. Those two words, *in me*, the things that you have learned, that you have seen and heard *in me*. And, of course, if our supposition is correct, that it is actually Jesus Christ that is coming to you and me with this message, the Lord Jesus Christ is setting before the Church at Philippi and he is setting before the Church here in this place, the apostle Paul.

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<sup>2</sup> Philippians 4:8.

<sup>3</sup> Philippians 4:1.

<sup>4</sup> Philippians 1:1-2.

<sup>5</sup> Philippians 1:2.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Philippians 4:9.

Now this man was no small figure. Well, he might have been small in stature, but as far as his work was concerned he was certainly not a small figure. The book of Acts, for example, records the conversion of the apostle Paul no less than three times. And I have heard it said—and I think it is correct—that the Bible gives more space to the conversion of the apostle Paul than to anything else except the passion of Jesus Christ. If the Bible is emphasizing the apostle in such a manner, then we ought to listen. We ought to take heed.

And when the apostle Paul says, “Look at me,” it is not only the apostle Paul that is saying this. I submit to you again, it is Christ who is saying this. Paul is setting forth himself and Jesus Christ is setting forth the apostle as an example for us. Look back at chapter three and verse 17 in Philippians. The apostle says, “Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us.”<sup>8</sup> Follow my example, mimic me, is literally what the text tells us. And so the apostle is desirous of others mimicking his behavior in Christ Jesus.

The book of Acts lays out the ministry and the life of the apostle. And here, again, many words are spent. And you know as well as I do that many books have been written analyzing the apostle. In the book of 1 Corinthians the apostle Paul, some would say, defends his apostleship. I would say Paul is actually setting himself forth as an example of the grace of God at work in a life. We need to pay attention to this. And in Romans chapter seven, particularly, the apostle Paul rehearses for us the struggle in his own heart for your benefit and my benefit. He is an example for you and for me. Christ is setting forth this example. And so these little words in Philippians chapter four and verse nine carry some weight.

And as Christ sets forth the apostle Paul as this example, the Lord Jesus Christ is very purposeful in what he is doing. Look with me at verse nine again if you would. “The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me...”<sup>9</sup> Here is the example that is given. And now look at the example. The things that you have heard from the apostle Paul, the things that you have not only heard from the apostle Paul, but you have learned them and received them. And not only so, the things heard and seen were not simply in the classroom. The example did not come only from the teacher’s desk. This example did not simply come from the pulpit. They saw the life of the apostle Paul in action. They saw how he lived. This was discipleship in action.

In the 16<sup>th</sup> chapter of the book of Acts, for example, we find the apostle Paul eager to go into Asia, but the Holy Spirit forbids him to go into Asia. And the apostle receives that famous Macedonian call. “Come over to Macedonia and help us.”<sup>10</sup>

And responding to the Macedonian call Paul goes to the chief city of the Roman colony of Macedonia which happens to be Philippi. He spends some time there. And after he spends several days there Paul, you recall, goes out to a riverside where a group of

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<sup>8</sup> Philippians 3:17.

<sup>9</sup> Philippians 4:9.

<sup>10</sup> Acts 16:9.

women are meeting on the Sabbath Day. And he begins to converse with them. And the Lord opens the heart of Lydia to respond to the things that Paul is teaching. Then Lydia and her household are converted. And when Paul leaves this meeting he begins to be followed around by a young lady who has a spirit of divination. And after a few days he gets a little aggravated because this spirit of divination is trying to undercut the ministry of the apostle. And so the apostle turns around and says, “Come out of her, you unclean spirit”<sup>11</sup> And within that same hour the young woman is healed.

Well, the book of Acts tells us that when the possibility of making money from this young woman’s prophetic utterances vanishes, folks get a little aggravated. A no small disruption occurs in the city so that the police are called and Paul and Silas are stripped and beaten and then thrown into jail. There is a few things to be seen and heard here.

Then in jail, put in the deepest part of the dungeon in the stocks, their ankles bound, Paul and Silas around midnight begin to sing. And some unusual things happen in the prison. There is an earthquake and the doors are opened, the jailer becomes frightened and rushes in, fearful that the prisoners have escaped. And Paul says, “Don’t be afraid, don’t be afraid.” And in that circumstance the jailer calls out, “What must I do to be saved?”<sup>12</sup> He is afraid, not only spiritually, but physically. He fears his prisoners are escaping and that he is therefore in jeopardy. Paul leads this man to Christ and all of his household is converted.

And because of the uproar in the city, the jailers, the constable, the leaders decide, well, we had better let this man go. We had better let these fellows go.<sup>13</sup> But Paul says, “You have them come down here and let us go. We are Romans citizens. Beating us as Roman citizens, that’s not going to sit well with the higher authorities.”<sup>14</sup> And so Paul puts a little fear into the leaders in Philippi and they come and they beg him to leave.

And after encouraging the new converts and encouraging the saints there in Philippi Paul goes on. And then he comes back later in his third missionary journey. In all of this, as Paul is there teaching and preaching and performing miracles, there are a few things to hear and to see and to receive.

And then we have this letter, this letter that Paul writes to the Church at Philippi. And, of course, this isn’t the only letter that we have, is it? “The things that you have heard and received, and learned and seen of me,”<sup>15</sup> Paul says. Christ is using the apostle Paul as an instrument of grace, an example to us, so that we can learn.

I would hazard a guess, having been in the ministry a few years and looking at the sermons that have been preached in the Church over the years. My guess is that a majority of the sermons preached in the Church today and in past years, come from Paul,

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<sup>11</sup> See Acts 16:18.

<sup>12</sup> Acts 16:30.

<sup>13</sup> See Acts 16:36.

<sup>14</sup> See Acts 16:37.

<sup>15</sup> See Philippians 4:9.

from Romans and 1 and 2 Corinthians and Galatians and Ephesians and Philippians and Colossians and 1 and 2 Timothy and 1 and 2 Thessalonians, from this corpus, from this body of letters. How we love to ply the pages of these letters.

And so we go back in Philippians chapter four and verse nine, “The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me...”<sup>16</sup> These words carry a lot of weight, I submit to you, from the book of Acts and the letters that are given to us.

And now, more particularly, what does Christ desire? Let’s look at our text again. Verse eight. “Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things.”<sup>17</sup> Dwell on these things. Let your mind work through these things.

Is this not good instruction for you and me? You must use your head and I must use my head. You must use your head, properly. I must use my head properly.

Whatever is true.... How we need the truth of God, how we need, as individuals, to marinate in the truth of God. And so often we are marinating in the ugly falsehoods that are perpetrated in our culture and in our society and come regularly to us over the airwaves in the news.

Whatever is honorable... Isn’t it refreshing when you hear news from the Middle East about how our servicemen are not only acting bravely, but when the news media is pleased to give us, oh, those precious little moments about those GIs in the Middle East building schools so that children can go to school. They are doing honorable things. How good it is to hear these things.

Whatever is right... Whatever is righteous, we could say. And, of course, preeminently Jesus Christ is the righteous one. And when you ply the pages of the Bible and read about Jesus Christ you see righteous living in action. It is a shame when national polls show political leaders rank above Jesus Christ as heroes, as is recently the case.

Whatever is pure... Movies and television—you know as well as I do—major in the impure.

Whatever is lovely...

Whatever is of good report... It warms your heart when your children or family members are able to come home and given you, as parents, a good report on their activity. It is good news. And the good report that is given to us in the gospel is of greater value.

If there is any excellence...

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Philippians 4:8.

If there is anything worthy of praise... To be able to pat someone else on the back and look at the good side, that the glass is half full, not half empty.

Whatever is excellent and worthy of praise... To be able to look for the good things to say rather than always looking for the negative.

Well, Paul, of course, has more in mind here than this. And Jesus Christ has more in mind here than this because ultimately the good, the righteous, the excellent is found in the gospel and in God himself.

“Set your mind on things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father.”<sup>18</sup> This is the exhortation that comes to us in a little bit different form in the book of Colossians. Set your mind on these things. Meditate on these things.

Here is the direction of Jesus Christ to you and to me. And it is not only to get your head screwed on straight and for me to get my head screwed on straight, but these things—as verse nine says, look at it again—these things, “The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things.”<sup>19</sup> Put the things that you have learned into practice.

Years ago I saw a little cartoon in *Christianity Today*. The cartoon had to do with the Great Commission. The caption of the cartoon went something like this. “The most neglected word in the Great Commission.” The Great Commission was put this way. “Make disciples of all the nations, teaching them everything that I have commanded you.”<sup>20</sup> But this is not quite right, is it? This is the Great Commission. “Make disciples of all nations teaching them to perform, to do, all the things that I have commanded you.”<sup>21</sup> The Great Commission has not only to do with learning the things of the Bible. It has to do with actually performing, actually doing, the things of the Bible. And in many ways I think this is a place where the church falters. We don’t give people an opportunity to practice their faith adequately. And we desperately need to do this.

You see, the whole matter of learning as we have it in verse nine has to do with discipleship. And it is tied directly to the idea of practice. A good way to understand a disciple is this. The disciple is an apprentice. And the old time apprentice would link up with a master, an individual who, perhaps, was a master plumber or a master clock maker or a master at some particular trade. And the individual linking up with that master clock maker would live with the clock maker and learn his lifestyle and learn his business. When he graduated from his apprenticeship, which might be when the clock maker dies, he would take over the business and he would then be a master clock maker.

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<sup>18</sup> See Colossians 3:1-2.

<sup>19</sup> Philippians 4:9.

<sup>20</sup> See Matthew 28:19-20.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

And this is what Jesus Christ desires from you and me. Jesus Christ desires you to not only have a head full of knowledge, he want you to be able to implement what you have learned and to be a master disciple. And so you are to practice what you learn.

A great example of this is Prison Fellowship. Have you done any reading about Prison Fellowship? They have gone into different prisons and engaged in discipleship programs. They have taught men and women the Word of God. They have seen men and women converted to faith in Christ. And they have worked with these men and women so that head knowledge is put into practice. And do you know what happens? They see lives changed. These prisoners begin to feel differently. They really begin to feel differently. And when they get out of prison, because they have learned certain things and they have begun to practice these things that have to do with Christianity and they have begun to feel quite differently about life, they don't go back. They don't go back to the crimes they formerly committed. The recidivism rate drops dramatically among these prisoners. It is quite an astounding thing.

And so the linkage that the lives of these prisoners exemplify is shown to us here in Philippians. Let's look at it again. Verse nine. "The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things; and the God of peace shall be with you."<sup>22</sup>

You use your head properly and you begin to practice what you learn. And what does Paul say? "The God of peace shall be with you."<sup>23</sup> The God who provides peace will be with you. "Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."<sup>24</sup> You learn the gospel and you practice the gospel. And what happens? You experience the peace that God brings. This is huge.

And this is covenantal. Paul is speaking covenantally here. Look at the very end of the verse. "And the God of peace shall be with you."<sup>25</sup> This is the Emmanuel principle, God with us. This is the principle of God's covenant. "I will be your God and you shall be my people and I will dwell among you."<sup>26</sup> I will be with you. God of peace will be with you. And when the God of peace is with you, friends, life is different. You do feel differently because the peace of God pervades your heart and mind.

Look at verses six and seven. We have the same dynamic.

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Philippians 4:9.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Romans 5:1.

<sup>25</sup> Philippians 4:9.

<sup>26</sup> See Jeremiah 30:22.

<sup>27</sup> Philippians 4:6-7.

“Be anxious for nothing, but...”<sup>28</sup> But what? Take action. Don’t just wallow in your anxiety, take action. “Let your requests be made known to God.”<sup>29</sup> This is the action step that Paul is calling for in verses six and seven. And then what happens? “The peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”<sup>30</sup>

Think properly, act properly, feel differently. You see, feelings follow. This is what the text is teaching us. You don’t act on how you feel. You act on what is right and true and honorable. And then you feel differently. This is the counsel from Jesus Christ through the apostle Paul.

And so when the alarm goes off in the morning. Ah, ah, ah! Don’t hit the snooze. You get up. You get dressed. You go to work. You accomplish the tasks that God has set before you in his providence. And when you come home, guess what? You will feel differently. There will be a sense of satisfaction because of work accomplished.

And you young people, same goes for school, doesn’t it? Ah, ah, ah! Don’t hit that snooze button. You get up. You go to school. You accomplish the tasks for your teachers that are required of you. And when you come home and can report to your parents what took place in the classroom, there will be a sense of satisfaction with regard to what has been accomplished. You will feel differently. Feelings follow.

Use your mind right. Think on that which is good. Practice that which is good. And you will feel good.

There is nothing better, in my estimation, when we see in a classroom or in the office individuals who have been taught or trained and they learn and put into practice what they have been taught or what they have been trained to do on the job and they come back and say, “You know, I get it. I understand the work. I love it.”

And they are feeling different because they have thought through some things. They have implemented what they have been taught. And the outcome has been profound satisfaction. This is what Paul is teaching you and me.

Look at the text again, verses eight and nine.

Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things. The things you have learned and received and

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<sup>28</sup> Philippians 4:6.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Philippians 4:7.



heard and seen in me, practice these things; and the God of peace shall be with you.<sup>31</sup>

Think on the good, practice the good, and you will feel good.

Let's pray together.

*Father, it is a good lesson for me and a good lesson for all of us. Forgive us where we set our feelings in a position where we think we need to follow them rather we see from your Word that doing that which is right and proper means that proper feelings will follow. Forgive us where we have gotten the cart before the horse and help us from this text to do that which is right and we know, Father, before you, because as the God of peace you will be with us. We know that we will feel differently in our families, in our homes, in our work, in the classroom no matter where it might be. So be pleased to bless us with this understanding of your Word we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

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<sup>31</sup> Philippians 4:8-9.