

Equipped to think biblically

Our thoughts matter. They are so much part of what it means for us to be human. They also set the scene for our emotional and behavioural responses. The trouble is we often don't give our thoughts the attention they deserve and can end up being quite careless regarding what we think about. The apostle Paul appreciated that our thoughts need to be brought into line and he has given us some ideas on how best to put them to good use. Take a look at what he said: "... *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*".¹ Sounds good, but what might this look like in practice? Let's see...

True: A lot of our stress in life comes from thinking things that aren't true. We find ourselves listening to - and perhaps believing - unsubstantiated gossip, holding on to thoughts of false guilt, and speculating about the future. The fact that these thoughts are not true doesn't stop us thinking them! Maybe if we made a conscious decision to test the accuracy of what we're exposed to, we'd be better equipped to reject lies and focus our thoughts on things that are true.

Noble: Noble thinking causes us to fix our thoughts on positives rather than negatives. It refuses to allow us to indulge in uncomplimentary thinking. When our daughter was about five years old, she watched Disney's "Snow White" movie and was not impressed with the scheming behaviour of Snow White's step-mother. "*But mummy*", said Laura, "*she does have nice lipstick!*" Let's get into the habit of focusing on people's good qualities and thinking of ways we can build them up.

Right: Right thinking is equitable thinking. It rules out unfair, discriminatory attitudes toward others based on, for example, their gender, race, or social status. In the New Testament book of James this kind of attitude is described as "*evil thoughts*".² Whenever we find ourselves developing a prejudiced outlook and ceasing to be impartial in our assessment of others, we would do well to ask, "*Is this right?*"

Pure: In Philippians 4:8, the word translated "*pure*" draws our attention to the issue of moral purity. To think pure thoughts, we need to be careful about what we allow into our minds. You're no doubt familiar with the GIGO effect - "*garbage in, garbage out*". This principle can also be applied to our thought life. On the other hand, if we make a deliberate choice to focus our attention on wholesome reading and viewing material, and ruthlessly filter out junk, we will be in a better position to think pure thoughts. The psalmist answered his own question about how someone can keep his life pure: "*By living according to (God's) word*".³ Good advice, huh?

Lovely: Life would be much more pleasant if we took the time to think about things that are lovely. 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 gives us some examples of what it means to think in this way. These are beautiful words and focusing on beauty can have such a positive impact on us, like listening to magnificent music or surveying spectacular scenery. One of the psalms tells us of the psalmist's desire to "*gaze upon the beauty of the LORD*".⁴ As we take time to do this, let's also find at least one lovely thing to think about every day.

Admirable: Whenever we celebrate worthwhile achievements, we are engaged in admirable thinking. That person who has overcome a bad habit, or this individual who has adopted a good one, are demonstrating behaviour worthy of our admiration. Let's look for those things that we can commend in others and major our thinking on this.

How about joining me in my desire to "*think about such things*"?

¹ Philippians 4:8 (NIV)

² James 2:4

³ Psalm 119:9

⁴ Psalm 27:4