

N U R T U R E
F A I T H
with
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Happy People

READ: Philippians 4:8 (Common English Bible)

“From now on, brothers and sisters, if anything is excellent and if anything is admirable, focus your thoughts on these things: all that is true, all that is holy, all that is just, all that is pure, all that is lovely, and all that is worthy of praise.”

MEDITATE:

Happy People, a song recorded by the country group Little Big Town, features positive lyrics that both evoke feelings of joy and well-being as it encourages kindness and a positive approach to daily life: “Happy people don’t cheat. Happy people don’t lie. They don’t judge, or hold a grudge, don’t criticize.” Supported by a driving percussion rhythm, the memorable lyrics sound a poignant note of the choices each of us are called to make daily – the choice to collapse beneath the hurt and brokenness that may come our way or the choice to rise above the fray of disappointment and positively move forward as best we can, “Here’s to whatever puts a smile on your face. Whatever makes you happy people.”

These lyrics offer sound counsel for living. It is the same counsel offered by the apostle Paul to those living in Philippi, “...if anything is excellent and if anything is admirable, focus your thoughts on these things.” Paul does not address the external circumstances the people may be facing. In fact, those external circumstances are very difficult. There is a constant threat of persecution for their faith and quarrels among the spiritual leaders of the church are tearing at the fabric of their community. Yet, these difficulties, though serious, are not to be determinative for the life of Christians. Followers of Jesus Christ do not “react” toward what is happening all around them – they “respond” positively, confident in the presence of the risen Christ working through them for the reconciliation of the world.

The difference between “reacting” and “responding” to daily life, and all each day brings, is considerable. Those who “react” give power to the circumstances of life for which they have little control. It is a power that will determine if the day will be filled with defeat or victory, sadness or happiness. The decision is made for us. But those who “respond” to daily life reserve that decision for themselves. For Christians, that decision is grounded in the certainty that, come what may each day, we belong to God. It is that knowledge that creates joy regardless of the circumstances we may find surrounding us.

Paul asks that we “focus” our thoughts. That is an intentional, purposeful decision, not a reactive one. Paul then proceeds to identify the qualities that are to occupy our minds and shape our character as a people of God: “all that is true, all that is holy, all that is just, all that is pure, all that is lovely, and all that is worthy of praise.” We are reminded that the course of our life need not be directed by what happens to us but, rather, how we chose to face daily challenges. Little Big Town concludes their song, *Happy People*, “Well life is short. And love is rare. And we all deserve to be happy while we’re here.” Paul wants us to know that the decision is ours.

