

Voices: The good, the true and the beautiful

February 7, 2018

“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things” (Philippians 4:8 ESV).

This is the final command Paul gives to the church at Philippi. He tells the church to focus their thoughts, their words and their hearts on the good around them. He tells them to remember and consider what is true and just. He calls them to reflect on what is lovely. Focus on the beautiful. Think about these things.

In a world of negativity and tension filled with fear, how do we think about these things? How do we center our lives on the good, the true and the beautiful?

Limit the outrage

One way we can begin to focus our hearts on the good and lovely is to tune out the outrage machine constantly blaring all around us. It is hard to think about what is true and honorable and lovely when we are disciplined more by cable news and talk radio than by the word of God.

The truth is, talk radio and cable news need us angry so that we will tune in tomorrow. They stoke fear in us so we won't tune in to the other side. When our hearts are filled with fear, tension and anger, it is hard to notice the beauty and goodness around us. We live in a world of noise. There are the hosts yelling on the radio, the pundits arguing on the television and the

commenter typing in all caps on social media.

When we live in outrage every moment we are awake, it is impossible to think on the things of God. To focus our hearts on the good, we must limit the outrage we intake every day.

Seek stillness

When we limit the outrage, we should seek stillness so that our hearts may focus and think. In the stillness, we begin to notice the beauty around us and the goodness God has shown us. When we are still before God, our hearts can focus on what is pure and just. We begin to have eyes to see and ears to hear because they are not filled with the noise of the world.

Our smartphones have made it almost impossible for us to seek stillness. We are always connected, always a swipe away from the noise. These handheld computers have rewired our brains and our hearts to keep us from thinking about the things of God. The benefits of our phones are far outweighed by the damage they are doing to our contemplative lives.

We must seek stillness by putting our phones away and reforming our minds and hearts to be able to reflect and think about the things of God. When we see the world with our eyes, instead of through our phones, we begin to see the beauty and the lovely all around.

Relate face-to-face

Finally, we can focus on the true, the honorable, the lovely and the excellent when we focus on others. When we move out from behind our screens and into real, genuine community, we see beauty and goodness evident in the lives of others made in the image of God.

Following Paul's command in verse 8, he tells the Philippians to practice

what they have seen, heard and learned from him. In relationship, he has taught them how to focus their hearts on the beauty of God evident in the world everywhere they look. In relating to them face-to-face, Paul has shown them how to think about these things.

We are made for community, made to relate to one another in love. The place we see what is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent and worthy of praise is in the lives of others, in community. We are meant to think on these things together and to practice seeing and proclaiming the good and beautiful in one another and to one another.

The church doesn't need more outrage or more noise. You don't need more outrage or more noise. Our spiritual health depends upon stepping away from the noise, from the fear and from the anger. Your heart needs stillness, it needs relationship and it needs to focus and think on what is good, beautiful and true, wherever these things are found.

Zac Harrel is pastor of First Baptist Church in Gustine, Texas.