

TAKE AN INVENTORY THROUGH PRAISE

- A. Introduction: God has given us a book—the Bible—which will revolutionize our lives if we take the time to read it. I don't mean read random verses. I mean read each of the documents as they were meant to be read, from beginning to end, over and over until we're familiar with them—especially the New Testament.
1. Paul, a man who saw the resurrected Lord Jesus and was personally instructed by Him (Gal 1:11-12), made this statement about the Bible—what it is and what it will do for those who read it. II Tim 3:16-17
 - a. All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching the faith and correcting error, for resetting the direction of a man's life and training him in good living. The scriptures are the comprehensive equipment of the man of God and fit him fully for all branches of his work (J. B. Phillips).
 - b. The Word of God resets the direction of your life. That means many things, but one major meaning is that you learn to no longer live only according to what you see and feel in the moment.
 2. The Bible reveals that there is an unseen dimension that our physical senses can't perceive—Almighty God and His kingdom of full power and provision. This realm can and does affect our lives. Col 1:16
 - a. Regular Bible reading helps you become persuaded of unseen realities. Living with the awareness of unseen realities lightens the load of this difficult life. Regular reading helps us deal with the onslaught of emotions and thoughts that come to us all in times of trouble. And it gives us hope.
 - b. The Bible records numerous examples where the veil that separates the seen world from the unseen was pulled back. These examples give us a glimpse of how the unseen can and does affect this life.
 1. II Kings 6:8-23—When the prophet Elisha was surrounded by an enemy army come to capture him, he had no fear because he knew he was protected by beings in the unseen realm. Those unseen angels delivered the prophet and his servant from the threatening circumstances.
 2. Acts 7:55-60—As Stephen was being stoned to death for his faith in Christ he was unafraid and full of hope as he looked into the realm he was going to enter when his body ceased to work.
 3. For several weeks we've been talking about the importance of learning to look at (mentally consider) and keep our attention (our thoughts and mind) on the way things really are according to God.
 - a. II Cor 4:17-18—Paul, in the context of his many troubles, was able to call them momentary and light momentary while he looked at what he could not see. There's always more information available to us than what we see and feel in our circumstances. The Bible reveals unseen realities.
 - b. There are two categories of things we cannot see—those that are future or still to come (the life after this life, the dimension we enter when we die) and things that are presently invisible to us (God with us and for us in every situation, to help us and get us through whatever we are facing).
 1. Keeping your mind focused on these unseen realities is impossible—unless you read the Bible often enough to become persuaded of the reality of things you cannot see.
 2. Keeping your mind focused is impossible if you don't exercise your will and choose to look away from what you see and feel in the moment to the way things really are according to God.
 - c. When you become persuaded of unseen realities and learn to keep your attention focused on the way things really are according to the Bible, Almighty God imparts peace, joy and hope to us through His Word. We have more to say in tonight's lesson.
- B. Emotions are stimulated by circumstances. When we encounter troubling, possibly dangerous situations, fear arises. We feel concern over what may happen to us. Worry is fear of the future or anxiety over what might happen. Both are tormenting emotions. The Bible addresses how to deal with worry and fear.
1. Phil 4:6-8—Paul instructed Christians how to respond in the face of worry. He told Christians to make your needs known to God and look to Him for help. Then, Paul instructed Christians to think on certain things, stating that if we do this, we will have peace of mind (the opposite of worry and anxiety).
 - a. We made the point in the last lesson that each of the terms Paul used to describe what we need to

think about to have peace of mind (whatever is true, just, pure, of good report, etc) is an attribute of God's Word. Ps 19; Ps 119; etc.

- b. The Greek word that is translated think on (or fix and fasten your thoughts) literally means to take an inventory. When you inventory something, you count up or make a list.
 1. You choose to call to memory what God says and then draw conclusions about your situation based, not on what you see and feel, but on His Word. Your inventory can include examples of God's past help or His promise of present and future provision.
 2. Phil 4:8—Let this be the argument of your thoughts (Knox); If there is anything worthy of praise, think on and weigh and take account of these things—fix your minds on them (Amp).
2. Notice Paul said that if there's anything worthy of praise, think on these things. Phil 4:8—Fasten your thoughts on every glorious work of God, praising him always (TPT). Praise helps you keep your focus on God, His Word, and the way things really are according to Him.
 - a. We tend to think of praise in terms of music—and you can praise God with music. But praise in its most basic form has nothing to do with music. To praise means to express approval or commend. When you commend someone you speak of them with approval.
 1. When I taught school I praised students because they demonstrated an admirable character trait or achievement in their school work. I commended them by recounting what they had done.
 2. It had nothing to do with music. It had nothing to do with how I was feeling or how my day was going. I praised students (commended them) because it was appropriate.
 3. Praise is acknowledging God by talking about who He is and what He has done, is doing, and will do. It's always appropriate to praise the Lord for these things. Ps 107:8,15,21,31
 - b. God works in our lives by His grace through our faith. When we believe what His Word says, God by His grace, brings His Word to pass in our lives. That's how we were saved from sin. Eph 2:8-9
 1. Praise is actually an expression of faith. When you talk about and thank someone you cannot see for things you can't yet see or feel you are expressing faith. II Cor 5:7
 2. Ps 50:23—Whoso offers praise glorifies me (KJV) and he prepares the way so that I may show him the salvation of God (NIV).
 - c. We often have many thoughts in our mind—especially when we face trouble and our emotions are aroused. We must make the choice to focus on what God says and let our thoughts be His thoughts.
 1. Praise (talking about who God is and what He has done, is doing, and will do) helps you focus your thoughts because it's very hard to say one thing and think another.
 2. You can get your thoughts under control with your mouth. The tongue is compared to the rudder of a ship. A rudder is tiny, but it changes the direction of huge ships. James 3:3-5
3. James 1:2—This passage instructs Christians to count it all joy when we encounter trials or temptations of any sort. Consider these thoughts.
 - a. God does not send trials to test our faith. Trials are part of life in a fallen world. (For an in depth discussion of this point read my book *God Is Good and Good Means Good*.)
 1. Trials test our faith because they make it seem as if God's Word is not true. The test is always: Will you continue to believe what God says despite what you see and feel in the moment?
 - A. Do you remember Joseph? The Word of God was the test is his ordeal—would he continue to believe God's Word despite his circumstances? Ps 105:17-19; Gen 37:5-11
 - B. The devil takes advantage of life's hardships and attempts to steal the Word of God by tempting us to disbelieve God when we're in emotional distress. Matt 13:21; Mark 4:17
 2. In the context of life's trials and awareness of the life to come, Peter the apostle wrote: Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressive and filled with glory (I Pet 1:8, ESV).
 - b. Before we move on I need to clear up a major misunderstanding of this passage. People mistakenly

use James 1:2-3 to say that God gives us trials to make us more patient.

1. First, trials don't come from God (James 1:13—He doesn't tempt anyone to stop believing His Word. Tempted is the same Greek word that is used in v2). Second, trials don't make people patient. If they did, everyone would be patient because everyone has trials.
 2. The Greek word translated patience means endurance. Trials don't create patience or make you patient. They give you an opportunity to express patience (endurance)—just as exercise doesn't create muscles, it gives you an opportunity to use and strengthen the muscles you have.
 3. v3—Be assured and understand that the trial and proving of your faith bring out endurance and steadfastness and patience (Amp).
- c. Christians are instructed to count it all joy when we encounter trials. Count means to deem or consider; used figuratively it means to lead before the mind. Joy is a response based on knowledge.
1. Count isn't the same Greek word Paul used in Phil 4: 8 when he said think on these things (or take an inventory). But it also has to do with mental activity—you bring something to mind.
 2. The Greek word translated joy comes from a word that means to be “cheer”ful (as opposed to feel) cheerful. When you cheer someone you encourage them with words. You help them take an inventory of the reasons they have hope for a good outcome—even though they are in a difficult situation.
 3. Count it all joy means to consider this trial as an occasion to cheer or encourage yourself with the reasons you have help and hope in your circumstance—despite how things look.
 - A. Take an inventory. Call to mind the fact that Almighty God is with you and for you. He is at work behind the scenes causing this trouble to serve His eternal purposes, as He brings genuine good out of genuine bad. And, He will get you through until He gets you out.
 - B. Praise helps you inventory because, by thinking and talking about God, you're acknowledging Him and what He has done, is doing, and will do in this circumstance.
4. None of this means that the feelings of fear and anxiety immediately leave you never to return, or that you never have another worrisome thought.
- a. It means that you know how to answer the emotions and thoughts according to reality as it truly is: God with you and for you, loving, guiding, protecting, and providing. God, through His Word imparts peace that passes understanding to your mind and heart. Phil 4:7
 1. Ps 94:19—When doubts filled my mind, your comfort gave me renewed hope and cheer (NLT); In the multitude of my (anxious) thoughts within me, Your comforts cheer and delight my soul (Amp).
 2. Ps 119:143—As pressure and stress bear down on me, I find joy in your commands (NLT); Trouble and distress have come upon me, but your command (your word) are my delight (NIV).
 - b. When you become persuaded of unseen realities through His Word and learn to acknowledge God (praise Him in the midst of the trial) you will be lifted up in the midst of it. That's the peace of God that passes understanding.
5. David, the great king of Israel, was a master at dealing with his thoughts and emotions in the midst of painful, dangerous, and overwhelming circumstances. He was able to put his focus on the way things really are by taking an inventory through praise to God.
- a. Before David took the throne he endured many years of being pursued by wicked men intent on killing him. During that time, he was cut off from Jerusalem and the Tabernacle (God's dwelling). David wrote a number of psalms in this period that give us insight into his state of mind.
 - b. Consider one example. In Ps 42 David expressed his longing to appear before the presence of the Lord in the Tabernacle at Jerusalem and shed tears over the fact that he couldn't do so because of his circumstances. But he talked to himself—his mind, emotions (his inner being).
 1. v5—Why am I discouraged? Why so sad? I will put my hope in God! I will praise him again

(in Jerusalem)—my Savior and my God (NLT).

- A. The phrase My Savior and my God in the Hebrew language literally says: Your presence is salvation. David knew God was with him, and God with him was all he needed. Ps 139
 - B. This was David’s way of saying what Paul said in Phil 4:11-13—I’ve learned to be content or self-sufficient—needing no assistance because God with me is all I need.
2. David knew that there were more facts in his situation than what he could see and feel. So he focused his attention on the way things really are according to God and took an inventory.
 - A. Ps 42:6—He remembered or called to his mind God’s past help to him and his people. From Mount Hermon to Mount Mizar is a geographic reference to all of the land of Israel.
 - B. The Hebrew word translated remember, in its most basic form, means a process of mentioning or recalling either silently or verbally. David took an inventory.
 - c. In times of distress, David not only remembered (or recounted) God’s past help, he remembered God’s promises for the present and future (His Word). David acknowledged or praised God for it.
 1. In another “on the run” psalm David wrote that when he was afraid he chose to trust God and praise his word. The Hebrew word translated praise has the idea of boast. In the hard times David boasted in (on account of) God’s Word Ps 56:3-4
 2. David got his perspective, his view of reality through repeated exposure to God’s Word.
 - A. The Law of Moses (Gen-Deut) had already been written and instruction in the Law was part of bringing up children. Kings were required to read it. Ps 78:3-7; Deut 17:18-20
 - B. At various times God spoke to David through His prophets. I Sam 16; II Sam 7
 - C. Preincarnate Jesus (the Word before His incarnation, the Angel of the Lord) spoke to David. II Sam 23:3-4; II Chron 3:1; I Chron 21:18-30
6. David referred to remembering in another “on the run” psalm. Ps 63:6—Lord, I remember you in the darkness of night in the Judean wilderness, and I meditate on you. Meditate means to mutter and by implication to consider. In other words, through using his own words, David put his focus back on God.
 - a. Sadly, this word meditate is sometimes used today to teach the idea that if we just confess or say the right words over and over it will change our situation. Yes, words are powerful and we do release authority through words. But in and of themselves words aren’t magic. They are an expression of your view of reality or what you truly believe.
 - b. We’ve missed the bigger point. All of us talk to ourselves all the time and this self-talk builds and then reinforces a view of reality in our mind. We must learn to build an accurate view of reality by talking about and focusing our mind on the way things really are according to God’s Word. You can’t do this if you don’t know what the Bible says—and you don’t if you aren’t a regular reader.
- C. Conclusion: We have more to say about this next week. But consider these points as we close this lesson.
1. Regular Bible reading helps you keep your focus on God because it tells you who He is and what He has done, is doing, and will do in your circumstance. Regular reading builds your faith or confidence in God to the point that you are persuaded of things you cannot yet see, so much so that you have peace of mind even in the midst of painful and trying circumstances.
 2. People who have begun Bible regular reading sometimes express frustration to me because they can’t quote many verses. I ask them: Is your perspective or the way you view your life and circumstances changing? Invariably, they tell me that it is. It’s about changing your perspective, not quoting verses.
 3. Praise to God—choosing to acknowledge Him by talking about who He is and what He has done, is doing, and will do—helps bring your focus back on the way things really are and keep it there, even in the most difficult circumstances. Not only does praise to God bring peace to your mind, you prepare the way for him to show you His salvation—to get you through until He gets you out. Ps 50:23