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*The Real Source of Peace*  
Philippians 4:1-9

*Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you. (Phil. 4:8-9)*

Things aren't always what they seem. Some things come to us directly; other things...indirectly. Some of our most desired qualities, accomplishments, and possessions come to us in a secondary manner as we pursue other appropriate goals. Life develops in the process of living.

The 1984 movie classic, *The Karate Kid*, is an example on several fronts. Like most "underdog" stories that seem to grab our attention, this one is no exception. The story is about a teenage boy, Daniel, who had lost his father by death and an Okinawan immigrant who had lost his wife and child during childbirth.

The new kid in town finds himself being bullied by some of the other teenage boys who are karate students. Mr. Miyagi interceded on Daniels behalf in a four on one fight. Afterwards, he offered to help Daniel, the new kid in town, peacefully resolve the conflict.

Mr. Miyagi initially goes with "Daniel son" to the Special Forces karate instructor and the aggressive boys to seek a peaceful resolution, but quickly finds the effort unsuccessful. Discovering in the instructor a repulsion for peaceful resolutions and disdain for Asian residents, Mr. Miyagi (a decorated war veteran, himself) agrees to help Daniel learn to protect himself, consenting to be Daniel's personal karate instructor.

If you have seen the movie, you will remember Daniel being given odd jobs at Mr. Miyagi's house—waxing antique automobiles using specific circular motions, sanding a wooden floor, painting a fence, then painting the house encircled by the fence. These chores were to be Daniel's payment for Mr. Miyagi's instruction. Becoming frustrated after days of work with no seeming

instruction, Daniel complains that he is not being taught karate and plans to quit. Mr. Miyagi reveals to Daniel that he has unknowingly been learning defensive blocks. His “chores” have actually been repeated exercises to develop muscle memory and strength.

Many of the things we learn are by-products of other activities. In a recent interview, Los Angeles Dodger’s new manager, Joe Torre, said that it was as catcher for the St. Louis Cardinals during his playing days that he learned the most about managing from Red Schoendienst, the player-coach at second base. Torre’s observation of Schoendienst’s became the inspiration that led him to success as manager of the New York Yankees from 1996 to 2007—reaching playoffs each season, winning six American League pennants, and four World Series titles, despite George Steinbrenner’s temperament and inability to be pleased. At the time, Torre was just a major league player unknowingly learning important characteristics of team management.

On September 18, 2007, Professor Randy Pausch delivered his lecture, “Really Achieving Your Childhood Dreams,” at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh. A month before giving this “Last Lecture,” he received the prognosis that the pancreatic cancer with which he had been diagnosed a year earlier was terminal. Never intending to do so from the beginning, Pausch’s lecture became a New York Times best seller. His young children received an unintended scrapbook from their father’s PowerPoint presentation. Pausch died July 25, 2008 in Chesapeake, Virginia.

Jewish and Christian scriptures are replete with examples of this principle. “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee, because he trusteth in Him.” (Isaiah 26:3) Jesus, in his Sermon on the Mount said, “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all of these things shall be added,” referring to food, clothing, and security. (Matthew 6:33) At other points, Jesus said things like, “the one who loses his or her life in the cause of others is the one who will ultimately find her life.”

In today’s text, the Apostle Paul offered a similar classic prescription in his letter to the congregation at Philippi. Most everyone desires an experience with God. We sometimes express it by saying we want deeper Bible studies, more meaningful mission experiences, or a position in church leadership. What we

really want, I think, is an experience with God or a deeper, more sustained experience with God. Though books, study groups, and theology courses can be gateways for such, encounters with God come in the most unexpected circumstances, at the most unexpected times—while reading a secular book, watching a movie, in the middle of a concert, sitting on the banks of the James River, a half hour of silent meditation in the sanctuary during Saturday’s upcoming prayer-vigil. Putting ourselves in a “position,” mentally and/or physically, for such to happen is the element of importance.

Paul said:

*Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.*

*<sup>9</sup>Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.*

Listen to Eugene Peterson’s paraphrase of this:

*I’d say you’ll do best by filling your minds and meditating on things true, noble, reputable, authentic, compelling, gracious—the best, not the worst; the beautiful, not the ugly; things to praise, not things to curse. Put into practice what you learned from me, what you heard and saw and realized. Do that, and God, who makes everything work together, will work you into his most excellent harmonies.*

The apostle’s challenge is to fill the mind with the right thoughts and the by-product of inner healthiness will follow. What kind of things are we mentally to live with? Things that are true—not innuendos and falsehoods. If something isn’t true, or if you don’t know whether it is true or not, don’t repeat it. Don’t be a spreader of insinuations. Doing so can significantly damage a person’s reputation beyond repair; it also eats away at your own character by accommodating such conversation.

In the South Carolina party primaries of 2000 (two presidential campaigns back), a telephone poll was devised asking South Carolina voters, “Would you be more or less likely to vote for John McCain...if you knew he had fathered an illegitimate black child?” At the time (eight years ago), McCain was campaigning with his dark-skinned daughter, Bridget. Bridget had actually been a very ill baby in Mother Teresa’s Bangladesh orphanage from where the McCains

adopted her. This racial and untruthful attack sabotaged his 2000 campaign in a way that it never recovered. How quickly we forget. If our candidates and friends can't be above such, for God's sake we must be.

Fill your minds with noble thoughts, on things and people who are noble, reputable, authentic, compelling, and gracious, the apostle urges. The end result is that you will observe an important discipline that will make of you a better person. In other words, put yourself in a position where good things are more likely to happen to you. "Fill your minds with the best, not the worst...the beautiful, not the ugly...of things to praise, not curse."

And what is the result of living life this way? "God, who makes everything work together, will work you into his most excellent harmonies." The New Revised Standard Version says it simply, "...and the God of peace will be with you." Do these things and you are sure to have repeated "God experiences."

Our first president was such a person, I think. George Washington kept a personal journal most of his life that included personal etiquette—rules of civility. What quality was it that made men like Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, Alexander Hamilton and the Marquise de Lafayette defer to him?

Following the Revolutionary War, history records the Newburgh Conspiracy in which disgruntled officers led by Horatio Gates circulated a letter. The letter suggested that the Army march on Congress to demand back-pay and hinted at a *coup de tat*. Washington summoned his men to his tent so that he could read a letter meant to dissuade them from such action. With the men gathered, he paused, reached into a pocket, and withdrew a pair of glasses of which few even knew he required. Unfolding them and putting them on Washington said, "Gentlemen, you will permit me to put on my spectacles, for I have not only grown gray, but almost blind in the service of my country." As the report goes, tears were seen streaming from the faces of his officers and the insurrection crumbled at the noble words of their leader.

*Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things...and the God of peace will be with you.*

## **Philippians 4:1-9 (The Message)**

**1** My dear, dear friends! I love you so much. I do want the very best for you. You make me feel such joy, fill me with such pride. Don't waver. Stay on track, steady in God.

### **Pray About Everything**

**2**I urge Euodia and Syntyche to iron out their differences and make up. God doesn't want his children holding grudges.

**3**And, oh, yes, Syzygus, since you're right there to help them work things out, do your best with them. These women worked for the Message hand in hand with Clement and me, and with the other veterans—worked as hard as any of us. Remember, their names are also in the Book of Life.

**4-5**Celebrate God all day, every day. I mean, revel in him! Make it as clear as you can to all you meet that you're on their side, working with them and not against them. Help them see that the Master is about to arrive. He could show up any minute!

**6-7**Don't fret or worry. Instead of worrying, pray. Let petitions and praises shape your worries into prayers, letting God know your concerns. Before you know it, a sense of God's wholeness, everything coming together for good, will come and settle you down. It's wonderful what happens when Christ displaces worry at the center of your life.

**8-9**Summing it all up, friends, I'd say you'll do best by filling your minds and meditating on things true, noble, reputable, authentic, compelling, gracious—the best, not the worst; the beautiful, not the ugly; things to praise, not things to curse. Put into practice what you learned from me, what you heard and saw and realized. Do that, and God, who makes everything work together, will work you into his most excellent harmonies.

## **Philippians 4:1-9 (NRSV)**

**1**Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved. **2**I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. **3**Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life. **4**Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. **5**Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. **6**Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. **7**And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

**8**Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

**9**Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.