

# Whatever

## *Philippians 4:1-9*

### Introduction

Two of my favorite literary characters are none other than ... Tigger and Eeyore.

Now, I realize that might seem a bit shallow to you. You might well prefer knowing that my brain functioned at a higher level, and that I would admire other duos such as:

- Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson
- Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn
- Don Quixote and Sancho Panza

But hear me out. I believe that A. A. Milne, creator of the Winnie Pooh stories, was a literary genius, a man who had great insights into the ways we humans think and behave. He wove those insights into his characters. That's why we love those characters. We all know real life Tiggers and Eeyores, don't we? In fact, right now we are resisting the urge to cast a knowing glance at the people around us because we've met them somewhere else. In the 100 Acre Woods, perhaps.

I also like Pooh and Roo and Owl. But Tigger and Eeyore are especially meaningful to me because they represent two different approaches to life.

- Eeyore is wired to focus on the flaw in any situation.
- Tigger, on the other hand, is wired to focus on the small speck of hope no matter how bleak the situation may be.

Some of you are old enough to remember when Ivory Soap advertised itself as 99 44/100% pure.

- If something was 99 44/100ths poison, Tigger would celebrate the half percent that was not poison.
- Since it is 99 44/100ths pure, Eeyore will only see the half percent of impurity.

Both will live their lives according to what they see. Both will live in total denial of reality. Neither can see both the good and the bad that exists around them. And certainly neither knows how to balance the two. And people are like that too.

I have good news. God offers us a better way. He gives us a third option to how we view the world. We see it played out in Philippians 4:1-9. To help us understand this, and apply it to our lives, I want to focus on a single word:

Whatever

We begin in verses 1-7:

### #1: TAKE WHATEVER ...

In the first part of this particular passage, Paul introduces us to two women. These women are apparently very well-known in the Church at Philippi:

*I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. (Philippians 4:2)*

Euodia and Syntyche. Two names that haven't worked their way back into the current lists of suggested baby names. These women, we are told, are having a bit of squabble. Instead of contending **for** the gospel, these two women are now contending **against** each other. We don't know any more than what we read here, so we don't know what they were squabbling about. It could be something major. It might be something minor.

Whatever it was, the mere fact Paul addresses it, demonstrates the squabble was damaging their Christian witness and also disrupting the life and ministry of the Philippian congregation. After all, Paul didn't waste papyrus and ink on non-essential things.

The overall category here is conflict. But we can apply the truths taught here in a broader context, so much so that we might say:

### **1. Take whatever your circumstances are**

You see, not everyone is dealing with conflict. For some of us "circumstances" are related to health, family, employment or any host of other realities life throws at us.

- We can even broaden it beyond individual circumstances to group matters: politics or civil unrest, for example.

The teaching is the same. Take whatever your circumstances are. Now hold that thought!

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After addressing the conflict issue, he turns to another matter. Look at verse 6:

*Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. (Philippians 4:6)*

How long is your prayer list? What kind of things are on it?

As you know, I take seriously the responsibility of praying for each of you. As you share your concerns with me, they go on my list and stay there until I'm told the prayer has been answered. My list is extensive, and it covers a host of different kinds of requests. Every one of those requests is someone's concern.

Whatever the concern may be, Paul tells us "don't be anxious about it."

Instead we ...

### **2. Take whatever your concerns are**

And we bundle with whatever our circumstances are. So now we have this nice little package of "whatevers."

Now, here's where my admiration for A. A. Milne comes into play. He understood that all those whatevers – our circumstances, our concerns – they all take up space in our head. You saw it in the text:

- Euodia and Syntyche were told be of the same mind. (v. 2)
- God does his work in our hearts and in our minds. (v. 7)

So when our mind is focused on circumstances and concerns, we can't use our minds as God intended. You know that, right? When your mind is held captive by circumstances and concerns that is all you can think about. You can't see the world or matters of faith or anything else clearly as God sees them. Like Tigger and Eeyore you are trapped in that half percent.

And worse yet, you can't as the Scriptures teach ...

- Have the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16)
- Set your mind on things about (Col. 3:2)
- Be like-minded with fellow believers (Phil. 2:2)
- Love the Lord your God with all of your heart, soul, strength, and mind (Luke 10:27)

If you were to read the margins of the Bible I used for my devotions through most of the 1980s, you would see written this written:

ZZ stinkin' thinkin'

ZZ. Zig Zieglar. Zieglar was a motivational speaker and a man of deep faith, one who would use the Scriptures in his presentations whenever he had the opportunity. The quote that inspired by margin was this:

We all need a daily check-up from the neck up to avoid stinkin' thinkin' which ultimately leads to a hardening of the attitudes. (Zig Zieglar)

When I read that note, I am once again reminded of the teaching of Paul in this passage. I take whatever my circumstances may be and bundle them with whatever my concerns may be and present them to God.

It is then that I become free to use my mind in a way that pleases God. It is then that I can begin to think about a whole new set of whatevers.

## **#2: THINK WHATEVER ...**

See verse 8:

*Finally, brothers and sisters, 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. (Philippians 4:8)*

It is a matter of re-setting your mind to think redemptively; that is, to begin to think like God thinks. When we think like Philippians 4:8, we can ...

- Look at racial unrest, and not fall into Eeyore mode. Instead we say with full certainty: "I think God is up to something." And as we do, we see a coming revival sweeping across our nation.
- Look at a personal diagnosis, and say "Let my life glorify you."
- Stand in the face of ridicule and persecution and know that "Greater is He who is in me than He who is in the world."

But to get to that point means we have to lay aside the whatever's of circumstance and concern, so our minds can be free for the whatever's of Philippians 4:8.

So ... how do we do that?

Christmas is 75 days away. Some of you have a family tradition of giving white elephant gifts to each other. You take something you don't want. You wrap it in a beautiful package and you give it away.

Changing your thoughts is very similar. I will take the whatever's of circumstance and concern, and wrap them up. When I do this, I picture pretty wrapping paper and beautiful bow. And I give that package to God.

In the church of my childhood, we would often sing a hymn that included this phrase "Take your burdens to the Lord, and leave them there." Some of the best advice I've ever been given.

## **APPLICATION**

In a few moments, I will lead you in a prayer and encourage you to do just that this morning. But before I want you to see the payoff for dealing with the whatever's in this way. Look at verse 9:

*Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you. (Philippians 4:9)*

Let's pray.

Amen.