

MONDAY, 9/9

Read Philippians 4:4.

In his writings, Paul doesn't often repeat himself. When he does, we should pay attention.

"Rejoice in the Lord always. I say it again: Rejoice!" he wrote. We would do well to notice a couple of things about what Paul says here. One, we should rejoice. I'm sure you picked up on that, but he has a point. Those in Christ should be a rejoicing people. We have been given the gift of life in Christ and the opportunity to walk with Him in our lives. We have received the most treasured gift in all creation. We should find great joy in the life we now live in Christ.

The second thing we should note about verse 4 is where our joy is found. The source of our rejoicing is "in the Lord always". This addresses what is often the immediate response to the call to be perpetually rejoicing: what happens when life stinks? It's hard to rejoice when life is hard, but that is assuming that our joy is based on how well life is going for us. While we hopefully find some joy in our lives here, we know seasons of struggle are inevitable. If we base our joy on how comfortable we are, we may not always be rejoicing.

Paul says that our joy must be rooted in the Lord and His promises. God is constant. He is always good, always faithful, always trustworthy. He doesn't shift like the circumstances in our lives are prone to do. He is a foundation upon which we can build our hope and never be disappointed. If He is the reason for our joy, then our rejoicing isn't subject to how well things are going for us in our lives.

This is a critical part of what it means for us to have the mind of Christ that Paul speaks of so frequently in the book of Philippians. Paul is calling us to think like Jesus, who set His joy upon His Father. Jesus faced much rejection in this world yet remained undeterred and His joy unchanged because it was rooted in His Father.

Let us have the mind of Christ so that we may find Him as our greatest source of joy.

Praying Together:

"Lord, we want to think like You think. Our hope is that our character would reflect You more and more. Open our minds so that we can see ourselves and our lives as You saw Yours. Take us on a journey to discover You as the source of joy. Yes, the blessings You have given us in this life give us reason for joy, but may You take the place as the greatest source of joy. Amen."

TUESDAY, 9/10

Read Philippians 4:5.

I grew up with my two cousins who were only a year and two years younger than I. We were rambunctious as children, always messing with one another. The youngest often

received the brunt of our shenanigans. He was easy to pick on, and we obliged, except when my grandmother was around. She might have been small in stature, but she evoked a sense of fear and respect. When she was close by, we were on our best behavior.

Paul holds a similar idea out for the church. God is near, so be on your best behavior.

The virtue Paul lifts up here is our call to gentleness. This might come as a surprise to us. We might see love or servanthood as a better fit here, but Paul focuses on gentleness. Perhaps the fact that the world is anything but gentle led Paul to lift this up to the church.

This world is far from being gentle. It is often sharp, rude, mean, and hurtful. It often brings out the worst in us if we aren't careful. Our response is often to be sharp, rude, mean and hurtful back--to "fight fire with fire" as the saying goes. The world may approve of such behavior, but that doesn't work for the Lord or His people.

Yes, the world can be cruel, but it doesn't change our call to gentleness. When Jesus sent out His disciples to do His work, He said, "I am sending you out as lambs among wolves." I would have loved to see the look on their face after hearing that. His point is that we go about Jesus' redemptive work in the same spirit He did. Jesus is the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." He was met by "wolves," but it was His love that emerged victorious. He could be gentle in the face of the harsh world because He would "overcome the world".

This is helpful for us to keep in mind when we find ourselves facing the worst of the world. When Jesus was about to go to the cross, He warned His disciples about their impending hardships. He told them in John 16:33, "I have told you these things, so that in Me you may have peace. In this world, you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." Jesus knew His victory over the world meant His followers could react differently than the world.

In a day that can be known as "a day of outrage," it is vital that we live the virtues of Christ. Jesus' followers must see themselves as apprentices to His way of living. This world doesn't need any more frustration, rudeness, or cruelty. It needs more of Jesus, so let us make Jesus known by our gentle spirit.

Praying Together:

"Jesus, You were gentle yet strong. It takes strength to be gentle in the face of adversity. Help us be strong. We want to show the world a different and better way. Calm our spirits. Give us Your peace and an ever-present awareness of Your victory over the troubles of this world. Amen."

WEDNESDAY, 9/11

Read Philippians 4:6-7.

Continuing the theme of Christ's followers seeking to live with Christ's mind, Paul teaches us how we should view prayer.

Paul presents prayer here as a means of combating anxiety. Anxiety is a product of living in this world. Each day we are faced with concerns and stresses that add up to anxiety. They stir up our souls and jumble our emotions. It is all too easy to get worked up in the day-to-day grind of life.

Paul suggests that we have one of two options when facing anxiety: give in to it or pray.

It seems clear to us that prayer is the better choice, but sometimes it is easier to throw up our hands. If you find yourself there, try leaning into prayer anyway. You might be surprised by what the Lord does in your life through it.

Paul encourages us to pray through our anxiety rather than succumb to it. He tells us to fight against anxiety by bringing our prayers and needs to our Heavenly Father who loves us. Hebrews 4:16 says it this way: "Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." That is the invitation for God's children. We are invited to come to our Father's throne to find the mercy and healing we so desperately need.

Paul tells us to be bold in presenting our requests to God. We aren't to be timid. We are God's beloved children. We have been granted wonderful access to the Lord, who loves to bless us.

When we pray this way, God is pleased to give us His peace. In John 14:27, Jesus said to His disciples, "Peace I leave with you: My peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." God wants to share His peace with you. It's a peace that "transcends all understanding," which means it doesn't always make sense that we can have peace in such circumstances--but we do.

I wonder what concerns you need to bring to God's throne of grace. I wonder what needs could use the Father's touch.

Bring your requests and needs before the Lord in prayer. Pray through your anxieties, and the Lord will give you peace.

Praying Together:

"Father, You love us more than we deserve. You are so good. You love to share the gift of Your love and peace with us. We bring our needs before You because You invite us to do so. Meet our needs. Satisfy our hopes and desires. May Your peace reign over our hearts and lives. Amen."

THURSDAY, 9/12

Read Philippians 4:8-9.

Here Paul addresses our thought life. He calls us to be mindful of the things about which we choose to think.

I wonder what things occupy your mind. What things do you think about throughout the day?

This is an important question for us to consider. Our thought life has a profound impact on our well-being. The Bible teaches that our mind is connected to our hearts, which then produce our actions. Let's think about this using this example from last week: you're watching a show on political commentary and your mind begins to fixate on the various subjects they cover. You begin to feel frustration welling up in your heart. Soon you find yourself growing angry. Before you know it, you begin complaining about "those people" to anyone who is around you.

Did you see it? Did you see how what begins in our mind impacts our heart, which then influences our actions? That is the way we work. This means that we must guard our thought life if we want to be more Christlike.

Paul suggests that we choose to dwell on that which is true, noble, right, pure, admirable, and excellent. This should be the criteria by which we measure whether something should have access to our thought life. If we dwell on such things, then we can expect that they will have a positive impact on our heart and then produce more righteous actions.

Now, Paul isn't telling us to ignore everything that is unpleasant. Sometimes we have to investigate things that we would rather not. His advice is that we proceed with caution. We must not let something negative take hold of our minds so that it produces unrighteous actions.

I wonder how often you find yourself dwelling on things that produce frustration. I wonder what practices you can take up that help move you toward things that are more lovely, pure, good, and excellent.

Praying Together:

"Holy Spirit, teach me how to grow in my thought life. I want the things about which I think produce more holy actions. I don't want my mind to dwell on things that produce anger or unrighteousness. Guard my mind. Let every thought be subject to You. I need Your help in this. Amen."

FRIDAY, 9/13

Read Philippians 4:10.

In this verse, Paul states one of the reasons for writing this letter. He is grateful for a financial gift the church made to support both his ministry and his life.

Paul is currently in jail in Rome. For months and months, he has been bounced from one jail and trial to another. He is hopeful he will be released, but there is no clear path

to freedom. In Paul's day, prisoners were supported by loved ones or they starved to death. Paul is indeed grateful that someone was looking out for him, and he sees the church's gift as a means of God's grace.

In the Greek culture in which Paul wrote this letter, a gift bound you to the giver. The giving of the gift called for a response from the recipient. This letter is Paul's response, but he takes it further. He doesn't just say thank you. He takes the opportunity to point to the glory of the Gospel.

Paul argues that Jesus has given us the greatest gift in salvation. Paul then asks the church, *what will you do in light of such a gift? What is your response to Jesus?*

We would do well to consider this for ourselves. Like the church at Philippi, Jesus has given us the gift of new life with Him. What is our response? What is a fitting gift to give in response to such grace?

Paul's answer is for those who received Jesus' gift of salvation to offer their lives back to Christ. It is the only appropriate gift. We might ask what this looks like. Throughout the letter, Paul states that this looks like our embodying the good news of Christ. We offer ourselves to Christ by living for Him. We seek to adopt His perspective about our lives by seeking to serve others in humility and love. In doing this, we bring Him glory and show that we have been changed by the gift of salvation.

It's worth noting that we offer ourselves as a gift back to Christ not out of obligation or a sense of earning. Salvation is a gift Jesus gives us. We do not have to earn it. It is a gift. This precious gift does invite us to respond, and the proper response in light of Christ's grace toward us is to offer ourselves. May we find the joy that is ours when we place our lives in Jesus' hands.

Praying Together:

"Lord, as You have given Yourself for me, so I give my life to You. I want You to live through me. May You shine through all I do and say. You have freed me to live in new ways. Teach me how to live and love as You do so that I may bring You glory. Amen."

SATURDAY, 9/14

Read Philippians 4:11-13.

While Paul is eager to thank the church for their gift, he also wants them to know that he is okay. While Paul is grateful for the support, he wasn't in some dire spiritual condition where the gift served as a lifeline of sorts.

Paul wants the church to understand that he is content, whether the gift arrived or not. This isn't to say that he isn't thankful. He is, but Paul wants them to know that he isn't dependent on anything in this earth to fill him. He is already filled.

Paul says that he has learned how to be content in life through any and every circumstance. We would do well to pay attention to what Paul says here. I don't know

about you, but contentment isn't something I have mastered just yet. It is easy to fall into the belief that we need something more than what we have to be happy or satisfied.

Paul says the key to contentment lies in being reliant--reliant upon Jesus for any and every need.

Paul has learned (likely the hard way just as you and I have) that life's circumstances can't be trusted to make us content. We will all go through seasons where we experience emptiness and need. That's life. Paul says his hope is in Christ who is able to provide strength that is sufficient regardless of the current trials.

Paul discovered that the more he turned to Jesus, the more he discovered Jesus' strength as a source of hope. As Paul faced hardships--and he faced many--Jesus was always present to lift his spirits. Jesus was always there to see him through. Over time, Paul's experience of Christ's faithfulness allowed him to trust Him more and more. Paul was eventually able to simply keep his eyes fixed upon Christ as his hope regardless of his present conditions.

If you're like me, you're still in the process of learning this. I'm sure you have experienced some of what Paul describes here, and yet it is hard sometimes to not allow the hardships we face to get us down and rob us of joy and contentment. We need the Lord's help so that we can look to Him and His provision in any and every circumstance we face in life.

Praying Together:

"Jesus, fix our eyes upon You. You alone can meet our needs. You alone can provide the strength we need in this life. Help us not put our trust in our circumstances, but rather to put our whole trust in You. Your grace is sufficient for our needs today. Fill us with more of You. Help our souls to be at peace because we know You are near to us. Amen."

SUNDAY, 9/15

Read Philippians 4:14-23.

Today, we're closing out the letter to the church at Philippi. Paul, along with Silas, was the one who founded the church there. Paul was in Philippi for only a short period of time, but he and the church had a profound effect on one another. Paul developed quite an affection for the church, and the church loved Paul.

You can sense that throughout the letter and even here as he wraps it up. Paul saw the church as his partners in the Great Commission to make Christ known and to make disciples. They were co-laborers in the mission Jesus had given His church.

It was important to Paul that the church understood the nature of their partnership. He didn't want the church to feel obligated to support him, as if they were buying his

affection, nor did he owe them anything for their generosity. They were partners, both committed to Jesus' mission.

Paul states for the church that he is fully supplied. He wants the church to realize that their gifts are a sign of their faithful participation in the Gospel. He also wants them to know that the same God who met his needs will also meet their needs.

It's worth noting that the last chapter focuses in on our personal needs. It reminds us that we have freedom to bring our needs to Jesus in prayer and provide us the assurance that Christ will meet our needs. It is possible for anxiety to be exorcised from our hearts. We can be content in our circumstances because Jesus is faithful.

I wonder what your needs are today. What do you need to bring to the Lord in prayer? In what areas do you need His strength to minister to your spirit?

We'll close today with Paul's short blessing at the end of the letter: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen."

Praying Together:

"Father, great are You and worthy to be praised. You are so faithful. You are so good to us. We look to You, our hope and our help, to fill us. We need Your grace and Your strength to see us through the troubles of this life. Thank You for being a refuge to which we can always run. Amen."