**Philippians 4:1-10**

Earlier in our study we noted that from the first word to the last, Paul’s letter to the Philippians is saturated with the theme of joy.Admittedly, some parts of Philippians 3 seemed more like frightening warnings that joyful encouragement. But Paul had to share a vision of the world as it really is in order for us to appreciate the inexplicable joy that comes from Christ in the midst of the mess and madness of our earthly realm.

Now in Philippians 4, Paul puts the finishing touches on his symphonic “*ode to joy”* with a soaring, moving, inspiring conclusion. Some of the most quoted, best-loved passages of Scripture are found in Philippians 4—as are a few obscure lines. We also get a sneak peek into the lives of some Philippians Christians and their real-life conflict. In this final chapter Paul argues that there is *joy in resting.* He includes perhaps the finest passage on contentment in all of Scripture, and this contentment is the essence of joyful living in the midst of a restless world. Whether the cause of our unrest is disunity (4;1-3), anxiety (4:4-7), lack of peace (4:8-9), discontent (4:10-13), or need (4:14-19), Paul encourages believers to find Christ-centered, Spirit-empowered joy in resting in God, and God alone.

“*Strand firm in the Lord!”* (Phil. 4:1).

With this command Paul begins to wrap up his letter to the Philippians. But what does it look like to “*stand firm*?” We might picture a righteous man or woman who is “*like a tree firmly planted by streams of water*” (Ps. 1:3)—fruitful and unshakable, even by the strongest storms. Or we may imagine a believer clad in the spiritual armor of God, standing firmly against the “*schemes of the devil*” (Eph. 6:11, 13), dodging and deflecting his fiery arrows of temptation.

In Philippians 4, though, Paul unexpectedly applies the notion of “standing firm” in relation to the experiences of anger and anxiety. The former causes outward conflict and division, while the latter leads to inward turmoil and despair. I can’t imagine two subjects more relevant and practical to deal with (especially as we weather this pandemic) than anger and anxiety. In a world of constant infighting and handwringing, anger and anxiety have pervaded even our churches, which should be flagships of both relational harmony and inner peace.

Paul tackles these problems head-on in Philippians 4:1-9, reveling how we can “*stand firm in the Lord*” against anger and anxiety. **READ Philippians 4:1-9.**

*“My joy and crown”* (v.1)*—*you see, they were going to be in the presence of Christ someday, and Paul expected to receive a crown for winning these individuals to the Lord. Also, they were his joy down here. Oh, how he loved these believers in Philippi!

*“therefore”* refers to the closing statement in Chapter 3.

“*So, stand firm in the Lord, dear friends*.” And, as Paul said to the Ephesian believers, “… *take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand”* (Eph. 6:13). The Christian faith will produce stability of life.

*I plead with Euodia (*U-o’di-a) *and I plead with Syntyche (*Sin’ti-che) *to agree with each other in the Lord.* (Phil. 4:2).

Now he comes to the only problem in the Philippian church. There was a ripple on the surface, but it was not serious. Paul doesn’t even mention it until near the end of his letter. Apparently these two ladies were not speaking to each other. He evidently thought the disagreement between U-o’di-a and Sin’ti-che was worthy of mention in a letter to be read publicly, but Paul seem confident that “*these women”* will be reconciled. His handling of the situation is a model of tact—he does not take sides but encourages others closer to the situation to promote reconciliation.

*3Yes, and I ask you, loyal yokefellow (companion or partner), help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.* (Phil. 4:3).

It is apparent that women occupied a prominent place in the early church, and for a woman to be prominent was unusual in that day. Paul plainly said that “*these women. . . contended at my side in the cause of the gospel*.”

“*With Clement* ”— here is a believer over in Philippi whom we haven’t met before.

“*And the rest of my fellow workers*”—those associated with the apostle in the cause of the gospel (women as well as men) are his equal, not subordinates. There were apparently a great company of believers in Philippi “*whose names are in the book of life*.” That was the important thing: their names are in the Book of Life.

*“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice.”* (Phil. 4:4).

Rejoice—under all kinds of circumstances, including suffering. This is a commandment to a Christian, a believer. Rejoice in the Lord always. That means regardless of the day, whether it is dark or bright, whether it is difficult or easy, whether it brings problems and temptations or clear sailing on cloud nine. We are commanded to rejoice. He repeats it, in case we missed it the first time: “*. I will say it again: Rejoice!*” Joy is something we cannot produce ourselves; it is a fruit of the Holy Spirit.

There is no power in a Christian’s life if he/she has no joy. One who does not experience the joy of the Lord has no power at all.

After Nehemiah had finished building the wall of Jerusalem, they set up a pulpit at the Water Gate, and there Ezra read from the Scriptures from morning until midday. These people had come out of captivity in Babylon. Most of them had never in their lives heard the Word of God. It overwhelmed them. They began to mourn and to weep. So, Nehemiah said, “*Wait a minute—you’re not to weep! This is a great day. You are to share in the blessings, the physical blessings, that God has given to you, and God wants you to enjoy them.*” God has given to us richly all things to enjoy, and to enjoy means to rejoice. That’s your strength, that’s your power. You can’t be a Christian with power without joy—that’s what gets up the steam. Joy is the source of power.

The world spends a great deal of money trying to produce joy, which they call happiness. Comedians are millionaires because they tell a few funny stories. People shell out the money to hear them. Why? Because they want to laugh. They are trying to find a little happiness as they go through life. The child of God who goes through life with a sour look and a negative approach to this world, will never have any power in his life. “*Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!*”

The world tries to work up joy in another way. They call it the happy hour or attitude adjustment hour. They spend a couple of hours drinking and hope it will help them overcome the problems of life and give them a little happiness. A great many people are trying to compensate for the inadequacies in their own lives in that manner.

One prominent pastor once commented that he thought it would be nice if churches could have an attitude adjustment hour. Here comes Elder Jones, breathing fire like a dragon because something doesn’t suit him. Wouldn’t it be nice to take him into an attractive room and have a cup of coffee and help him recover his cool so he could go in and enjoy the sermon? Perhaps we do need an attitude adjustment hour, a happy hour, in the church. Frankly, the Devil has gotten in his licks—he has made folk believe they can’t have fun going to church, and I think they can. I think it ought to be a joyful place and a place of power.

*“Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.”* (Phil. 4:5).

Matthew Arnold, English poet and cultural critic in the 1800s, in one of his delightful essays, interprets it this way: “*Let your sweet reasonableness be known unto all men.*” I like that. We need to be reasonable believers, not bigots in our faith. Of course, we ought to have deep convictions, but we should not be given to bigotry or always emphasizing some little point. What we need to do is emphasize the big point—we do have one—the big point is the person of Christ. If we are going to ride a hobbyhorse, let Him be the hobbyhorse. “*Let your sweet reasonableness be known unto all men.”*

“*The Lord is near or at hand*.” Paul believed that the Lord Jesus would come at any moment. He was not expecting to enter the Great Tribulation; he says, “*The Lord is near*.” That’s quite wonderful!

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

“*Do not be anxious about anything*” is sometimes translated: *Be anxious for nothing, or not overly anxious.* Anxiety and prayer are two great opposing forces in Christian experience.

*“Thanksgiving”* is the antidote to worry (along with prayer and petition).

Dr. J. Vernon McGee had his own translation. It goes like this: “*Worry about nothing; pray about everything*.” Prayer is the secret of power.

“*Worry about nothing*.” In verse 4 we were given one of the new commandments God has given us: Rejoice. Now here is another commandment. Worry about nothing; pray about everything.

Nothing is a very interesting word. If you have something, it’s not nothing—that is not correct grammar, but it is an accurate statement. Nothing is nothing, and you are to worry about nothing. Does this mean we are to look at life through rose-colored glasses, that we are not to face reality? Are we to believe that sin is not real, that sickness is not real, that problems are not real? Are we to ignore these things? No. Paul says that we are to worry about nothing because we are to pray about everything. Nothing is the most exclusive word in the English language. It leaves out everything. “*Worry about nothing*.” I confess that this is a commandment I sometimes break—I worry.

But the reason we are to worry about nothing is because we are to pray about everything. This means that we are to talk to the Lord about everything in our lives. Nothing should be left out. Ray Stedman tells the story about Dr. G. Campbell Morgan, the renowned British evangelist, preacher and Bible scholar—probably the most popular preacher in England during the first half of the last century. Dr. Morgan was approached by a wealthy elderly widow in Philadelphia with this question, “*Dr. Morgan, do you think we should pray about the little things in our lives?*” Dr. Morgan in his characteristically British manner said, “*Madam, can you mention anything in your life that is big to God?*” When we say that we take our big problems to God, what do we mean? They are all little stuff to Him. And what we call little He wants us to bring to Him also. As believers we need to get in the habit of bringing everything to Him in prayer—nothing excluded. When you go on a trip in your car and it involves several hours of driving, do you invite the Lord Jesus to go along with you. Do you talk to Him and tell Him everything about your life, things you wouldn’t tell anyone else? We should make it a habit to tell Him everything. We should learn to do that. We ought to pray about everything.

Christian spiritualists during the Middle ages were renowned for mostly seeking a deeper, spiritual connection with God. Ray Stedman in his commentary on these verses shares an admonition by Francis Fenelon, one of the spiritualists of the Middle Ages, which seems to encompass what Paul meant when he said, “*Pray about everything*.”

“*Tell God all that is in your heart, as one unloads one’s heart, its pleasures and its pains, to a dear friend. Tell Him your troubles, that He may comfort you; tell Him your joys, that He may sober them; tell Him your longings, that He may purify them; tell Him your dislikes, that He may help you to conquer them; talk to Him of your temptations, that He may shield you from them; show Him the wounds of your heart, that He may heal them; lay bare your indifference to good, your depraved tastes for evil, your instability. Tell Him how self-love makes you unjust to others, how vanity tempts you to be insincere, how pride disguises you to yourself as to others.*

*If you thus pour out all your weaknesses, needs, troubles, there will be no lack of what to say. You will never exhaust the subject. It is continually being renewed. People who have no secrets from each other never want for subjects of conversation. They do not weigh their words, for there is nothing to be held back; neither do they seek for something to say. They talk out of the abundance of the heart, without consideration, just what they think. Blessed are they who attain to such familiar, unreserved intercourse with God.”*

Stedman says that for many years he had carried this quotation in his Bible, and every now and then he would take it out and read it.

Maybe you think it sounds very pious when someone testifies that they take their burdens to the Lord in prayer. In my own life I must confess that after I spread everything out before Him, when I finish praying, I often pick it all or in part right back up, put the problems back on my shoulders, and start out with the burden again. That is my problem. The Lord wants us to trust Him so that we worry about nothing, pray about everything. Don’t you often wish you could say that *I’m as free as the bird in the trees, free as the bees gathering honey*. That’s the way He wants us to be.

“*With thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.*” Paul never lets prayer become a leap in the dark. It rests on a foundation. “*So, then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God”* (Rom. 10:17). Prayer rests on faith, and faith rests on the Word of God. Now he says that when you go to God with a request, thank Him. Thank Him right then and there.

Some people interpret this to mean that when you get your answer to your prayer, you are to go back and thank God. Well, that’s not what Paul said. What he says is that when you make your requests, right there and then you are to thank God for hearing and answering your prayer.

Now perhaps you are thinking, but maybe God won’t answer my prayer. I have many unanswered prayers. It took a while, but I have come to believe that we do not have unanswered prayers, and we should be ashamed for inferring that we have a heavenly Father who won’t hear and answer our prayers. You may have prayed for a certain thing and didn’t get it, but you did get an answer to your prayer.

Let me illustrate this with a very homely illustration. My dad was a Christian—a man with a strong faith; he was a stern man but a very good dad. At times I would ask him to use the car to go out with my friends. He usually said “yes,” but there were a few times when his answer was “No.” I can tell you today that I never made a request of him that he didn’t hear and answer. But I can say that my dad’s no was more positive than his yes. His no ended the discussion. In fact, I have never understood young people who keep on arguing with their parents after the parents have handed down a decision—and also parents who allow their children to argue with them. When my dad said, “No,” that was the end of the discussion. I have learned now that “no” was indeed a wise reply to those requests that were refused, although I did not think so at the time. But the fact is that he gave an answer to my every request.

God has a lot of spoiled children. When He says no to them, they pout and say, “*I have unanswered prayers*.” You don’t have unanswered prayers. God always hears and answers your prayers.

You can take anything to God in prayer, the big things and the little things. How can you sort them out? They are all little things to God.

Dr. J. Vernon McGee tells the story about when he was a young pastor in Texas, just married. He went to a certain city to preach in a church that was considering him as a candidate pastor. It was considered a strategic, outstanding church. After he had preached twice that Sunday, he was given a call by the church. Then later they had to come back and tell him that the denomination would not permit them to call him. As he said, it was a strategic church and they needed a church politician there—which he was not. Dr. McGee went on to say that he didn’t go into the ministry for that purpose. But he felt that the Lord had made a great mistake by not letting him go to that church as pastor. Many years later, Dr. and Mrs. McGee went by that church just to see it. It had gone into liberalism. Dr. McGee said to his wife, “*Do you remember years ago when I thought I should have had the call for that church*?” She said, “*Yes*.” Then he said, “*I thank God that He heard and answered my prayer the right way—not the way I prayed it*.” He said that he could look back and remember how he had cried to the Lord. He had told Him how He had failed him and caused him to miss the greatest opportunity he ever had. He said, “*Oh, I blamed Him, and I found fault with Him, and I actually scolded Him because He didn’t seem to know what was best for me! He had shut that door so tight that the resounding slam was in my ears for several years after that.”* He went on to say, “*My friend, my heavenly Father had answered my prayer, and, I am ashamed of the fact that I did not thank Him at the time*.”

Instead of saying that God has not answered your prayers, say, “*My heavenly Father heard my prayer, but He told me no, which was the right answer*.” We are to let our “*requests be made known unto God with thanksgiving.”*

*And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.* (Phil. 4:7).

The Scripture speaks of other kinds of peace, which we can understand. There is world peace. We have the assurance that someday peace will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea. It will come through the person of Christ, the Prince of Peace. Also, there is the peace that comes when sins are forgiven: “*Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ*” (Rom. 5:1). Then there is the peace that is tranquility. The Lord Jesus said, *“Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you* …” (John 14:27). That is a marvelous peace, but it is not “*the peace … which passeth all understanding*.” I do know it is a peace in which we do not live at all times. I think it is a peace that sweeps over our souls at certain times. Have you ever looked at the end of the day at a great sunset or a sunrise in the morning with a backdrop of mountains or rushing waves? And as you looked at the majesty of God’s creation, what a peace came to you. I can’t tell you what it was—it “*passeth all understanding*.” And that same peace came when my heavenly Father allowed some turmoil in my life—and I committed it all to him and told Him I wanted to know He was real, He made Himself real and that peace that “*passeth all understanding*” flooded my soul. I don’t know how to tell you what it is; I can only say that it is wonderful.

Someone wrote that it is *“the inner tranquility that comes when the believer commits all his cares to God in prayer and worries about them no more.* The full dimensions of God’s love and care are beyond human comprehension.

This peace “*shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus*.” There are those who say that prayer changes things. I can’t argue with that; prayer does change things. But that is not the primary purpose of prayer.

Notice that we entered this passage in anxiety, with worry, and we come out of the passage with peace. Between the two was prayer. Have things changed? Not really. The storm may still be raging, the waves still rolling high, the thunder still resounding. Although the storm has not abated, something has happened in the individual. Our daughter Terri has used this saying on numerous occasions: “‘*Sometimes God calms the storm, but sometimes God lets the storm rage and calms His child.”*

Something has happened to the human soul and the human mind. In our anxiety we want God to change everything around us. “*Give us this.” “Don’t let this happen.” “Open up this door.”* We should be praying, “*Oh, God, change me.”* Prayer is the secret of power. We enter with worry, and we can come out in peace.

Joy is the source of power; prayer is the secret of power.

*Finally, brothers, 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.* (Phil. 4:8).

“*Finally, brothers or brethren*”—remember that he said, “*Finally, brothers*” at the beginning of chapter 3, when he was just halfway through? Well, now he is nearly through and is giving his last admonitions.

This has been called the briefest biography of Christ. He is the One who is “*true*.” He is the *Way*, the *Truth*, and the *Life*. “*Whatsoever things are honest*”—He is honest. “*Whatsoever things are just”*—He is called the Just One. “*Pure*”—the only pure individual who ever walked this earth was the Lord Jesus. He asked the question, “*Which of you convicted me of sin?”* No one did. He also said*,* “… *the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me*” (John 14:30). Satan always finds something he can hook onto in me. How about you? But there was nothing in the Lord Jesus. He was “… *holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners* …” (Heb. 7:26). He was lovely which means “*gracious*.” Virtue has to do with strength and courage. He was the One of courage, a real man. He took upon Himself our humanity. “*If … any praise*”— He is the One you can praise and worship today.

We live in a dirty world. And if a Christian is going to spend his time with the dirt and filth and questionable things of this world, there will not be power in his or her life.

The reason there are so many weak Christians is that we often spend our time with the things of the world, filling our minds and hearts and tummies with the things of this world. Then we wonder why there is no power in our lives.

We need a sanctuary. We need something to think upon that will clean up our minds. Here are some questions to think about: How much time do you spend with the Word of God? How much time do you spend contemplating Christ? And as Paul wrote in his second letter to the Corinthians: “*But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the spirit of the Lord*” (II Cor. 3:18). The Word of God is a mirror, and in it we behold the glory of the Lord. The only way you can behold the living Christ is in the Word of God. As you behold Him, there is a liberty, a freedom, and a growth that He gives you. You cannot come by it in any other way.

Too often people come to the church to be entertained. Someone has said that people come to church to eye the clothes or to close the eyes. Many seem to sit in a daze for an hour just to feel religious or pious. But, only the Word of God can bring strength to us. We need physical food when we are weak; we need bread and meat to give us strength. The Word of God is our spiritual bread and meat. The only way to grow spiritually is to spend time in the Word of God.

I think one of the things that will cause believers to be ashamed at the appearing of Christ will be their ignorance of the Scriptures when they stand in His presence. He will say to many of us, “*I gave you all the information you needed in the Scriptures. You didn’t listen to Me; you didn’t hear Me*.” We say that one of the problems with our children is that they don’t listen to their parents. The problem with the children of God is that they don’t listen to their heavenly Father. Deliberation of Christ—that is the sanctuary of power. Many of us need to leave the busyness and dirtiness of this world and go aside with the Word of God where we can contemplate Him, worship Him, and praise Him.

What a person allows to occupy his or her mind will sooner or later determine their speech and their action. Paul’s exhortation to “*think about such things”* is followed by a second exhortation, *“put it into practice* in verse nine.

*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.* [Phil. 4:9].

**APPLICATION FOR US (Philippians 4:1-9):** How do we apply these words of guidance from Paul?

Chances are good that you find yourself resonating with one of the roles played in Paul’s discussion of how to stand firm in the Lord. Maybe you can relate to Euodia and Syntyche: You’re in the midst of a longstanding conflict with somebody in the church, at home, at work, or perhaps in your neighborhood. Or maybe you’re stuck in the awkward position of Paul or the “true companion”— somebody in a position to help others resolve their conflicts. Perhaps you’re struggling with nagging worry or uncontrollable anxiety, either caused by real sources of stress or by your own obsession over things out of your control (like isolation and distancing from loved ones during this ongoing pandemic).

Whatever your present situation—external conflict or internal unrest—Paul gives us some practical principles to begin fighting for peace in our lives. There are probably more than these but let me share with you three specific things we can begin doing in our lives to help us overcome anger and anxiety, enabling us to restore peace in our relationships and in our hearts.

First, *rejoice.* Trade in our old upside-down grin (☹) and put a smile (☺) back on our faces. Teach our hearts to rejoice again. Laugh more freely. Live lightheartedly. Cultivate a good sense of humor. Take God seriously and take others seriously, but we shouldn’t take ourselves so seriously. Proverbs 17:22 says, “*A joyful heart is good medicine.”* Chuck Swindoll on his insights to these verses says, “*As I look back on my years—it is my experience that very few joyful people remain in conflict with others. And*

*rarely do rejoicing and fretting dwell for long in the same heart and mind*.” So, we should take Paul’s advice and rejoice.

Second, *relax.* We need a healthy dose of gentleness and forbearance. To put in another way, we need to *chill out.* We don’t have to respond nastily to every nasty comment somebody makes. It’s all right to just let things slide sometimes. We can be easy on people, rather than being hard on them. We can and should relax in our relationships—with our spouses, children, friends, and even total strangers. If Euodia and Syntyche would have just relaxed a little, they probably could have smoothed over their differences. And if we learn to relax in the midst of stressful circumstances, we can enjoy the peace of God that surpasses all comprehension.

Third and last, *rest.* This doesn’t mean that we are to do nothing. It means ceasing the mind-racing, heart-pounding, stomach-churning activities that keep us in a constant state of anxiety and edginess. Do you ever notice how dysfunctional our relationships are when we’re stressed out? Paul’s concept of rest is to fix the heart and mind on positive things. Take a good look at Paul’s sampling of things worth dwelling on in Philippians 4:8 and consider their alternatives.

* Whatever is true . . . not false, untrustworthy, or imagined
* Whatever is honorable . . . not shameful, twisted, or foolish
* Whatever is right . . . not wrong, sinful, or rebellious
* Whatever is pure . . . not tainted, coarse, or immoral
* Whatever is lovely . . . not distorted, ugly, or offensive
* Whatever is of good repair . . . not gossipy, slanderous, or sarcastic
* Whatever is excellent . . . not inferior, wasteful, or flawed
* Whatever is worthy of praise . . . not objectionable, insulting, or evil

Rejoice. Relax. Rest. When these principles become practices, and the practices become patterns, then “*the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus”* (4:7). God’s dream will become our reality.

**Prayer:** *Father, we know You are preparing something marvelous to do through our church and our individual ministries and we ask You to prepare our hearts and especially the hearts of our leaders to bend to Your will and be sensitive to those things You desire to do. I pray that we will hear Your voice clearly through Scriptures and good, biblical counsel. We ask you to prepare our hearts for the work of expanding the kingdom and to prepare our hearts and those to whom we share Your Word to seek to do your will. Help us to live in holiness, to live a life that is pleasing to You, and to soften the hard ground of our own hearts and make it more pliable and workable to Your desires and to do the same for our pastor, elders, deacons, and every spiritual leader in the church and for the glory and honor of the great name of Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.*