

Philippians 4
August 11, 2024

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: What do you think is the difference between happiness and joy? [Let people engage]

Transition: As you have already brought out, happiness often is dependent on our earthly circumstances, and joy which comes from the Lord. Remember that Paul is writing this from prison, in circumstances that we would think might leave us void of joy. We, too, are living in days of unrest. It's easy to see how we can "rejoice in the Lord always" when all seems right in our world, but Paul says we ought to rejoice even when things are difficult. Let's read the text.

BOOK:

4 Therefore, my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, that is how you should stand firm in the Lord, dear friends!

Exhortations

² I plead with Euodia, and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord. ³ Yes, and I ask you, loyal yokefellow, 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.

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! ⁵ Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. ⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

⁸ 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. 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.

Thanks for Their Gifts

¹⁰ I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you have been concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. ¹¹ I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. ¹² I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. ¹³ I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

¹⁴ Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. ¹⁵ Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; ¹⁶ for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need. ¹⁷ Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account. ¹⁸ I have received full payment and even more; I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus

the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. ¹⁹ And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

²⁰ To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Final Greetings

²¹ Greet all the saints in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me send greetings. ²² All the saints send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar's household.

²³ The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What did you most like about this passage? What resonated with you? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you least like about this passage? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you find in this passage that you didn't understand? [Let people engage]

Q: What do we learn about Jesus in this passage? [Let people engage]

LOOK:

Instead of having spiritual ups and downs as the situation changed, Paul went right on, steadily doing his work and serving Christ. His personal references at the close of this letter indicate that he was not the victim of circumstances but the victor over circumstances: "I can accept all things" (Phil. 4:11); "I can do all things" (Phil. 4:13); "I have all things" (Phil. 4:18). Paul did not have to be pampered to be content; he found his contentment in the spiritual resources abundantly provided by Christ.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Vol. 2, pp. 94-99). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

YOU DON'T HAVE TO WORRY!

Philippians 4:1–9

If anybody had an excuse for worrying, it was the Apostle Paul. His beloved Christian friends at Philippi were disagreeing with one another, and he was not there to help them. We have no idea what Euodia and Syntyche were disputing about, but whatever it was, it was bringing division into the church. Along with the potential division at Philippi, Paul had to face division among the believers at Rome (Phil. 1:14–17). Added to these burdens was the possibility of his own death! Yes, Paul had a good excuse to worry—but *he did not!* Instead, he took time to explain to us the secret of victory over worry.

What is worry? The Greek word translated “anxious” (careful) in Philippians 4:6 means “to be pulled in different directions.” Our hopes pull us in one direction; our fears pull us the opposite direction; and we are pulled apart! The Old English root from which we get our word “worry” means “to strangle.” If you have ever really worried, you know how it does strangle a person! In fact, worry has definite physical consequences: headaches, neck pains, ulcers, even back pains. Worry affects our thinking, our digestion, and even our coordination.

From the spiritual point of view, worry is *wrong thinking* (the mind) and *wrong feeling* (the heart) about circumstances, people, and things. Worry is the greatest thief of joy. It is not enough for us, however, to tell ourselves to “quit worrying” because that will never capture the thief. Worry is an “inside job,” and it takes more than good intentions to get the victory. The antidote to worry is the *secure mind*: “And the peace of God ... shall keep [garrison, guard like a soldier] your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:7). When you have the secure mind, the peace of God guards you (Phil. 4:7) and the God of peace guides you (Phil. 4:9). With that kind of protection—why worry?

If we are to conquer worry and experience the secure mind, we must meet the conditions that God has laid down. There are three: right praying (Phil. 4:6–7), right thinking (Phil. 4:8), and right living (Phil. 4:9).

Right Praying (Phil. 4:6–7)

Paul does not write, “Pray about it!” He is too wise to do that. He uses three different words to describe “right praying”: *prayer*, *supplication*, and *thanksgiving*. “Right praying” involves all three. The word *prayer* is the general word for making requests known to the Lord. It carries the idea of adoration, devotion, and worship. Whenever we find ourselves worrying, our first action ought to be to get alone with God and worship Him. Adoration is what is needed. We must see the greatness and majesty of God! We must realize that He is big enough to solve our problems. Too often we rush into His presence and hastily tell Him our needs, when we ought to approach His throne calmly and in deepest reverence. The first step in “right praying” is *adoration*.

The second is *supplication*, an earnest sharing of our needs and problems. There is no place for halfhearted, insincere prayer! While we know we are not heard for our “much speaking” (Matt. 6:7–8), still we realize that our Father wants us to be earnest in our asking (Matt. 7:1–11). This is the way Jesus prayed in the Garden (Heb. 5:7), and while His closest disciples were

sleeping, Jesus was sweating great drops of blood! Supplication is not a matter of carnal energy but of spiritual intensity (Rom. 15:30; Col. 4:12).

After adoration and supplication comes *appreciation*, giving thanks to God (see Eph. 5:20; Col. 3:15–17). Certainly, the Father enjoys hearing His children say, “Thank You!” When Jesus healed ten lepers, only one of the ten returned to give thanks (Luke 17:11–19), and we wonder if the percentage is any higher today. We are eager to ask but slow to appreciate.

You will note that “right praying” is not something every Christian can do immediately, because “right praying” depends on the right kind of mind. This is why Paul’s formula for peace is found at the *end* of Philippians and not at the *beginning*. If we have the *single mind* of Philippians 1 then we can give *adoration*. (How can a double-minded person ever praise God?) If we have the *submissive mind* of Philippians 2, we can come with *supplication*. (Would a person with a proud mind ask God for something?) If we have the *spiritual mind* of Philippians 3 we can show our *appreciation*. (A worldly-minded person would not know that God had given him anything to appreciate!) In other words, we must practice Philippians 1, 2, and 3 if we are going to experience the *secure mind* of Philippians 4.

Paul counsels us to take “everything to God in prayer.” “Don’t worry about *anything*, but pray about *everything!*” is his admonition. We are prone to pray about the “big things” in life and forget to pray about the so-called “little things”—until they grow and become big things! Talking to God about *everything* that concerns us and Him is the first step toward victory over worry.

The result is that the “peace of God” guards the heart and the mind. You will remember that Paul was chained to a Roman soldier, guarded day and night. In like manner, “the peace of God” stands guard over the two areas that create worry—the heart (wrong feeling) and the mind (wrong thinking). When we give our hearts to Christ in salvation, we experience “peace with God” (Rom. 5:1); but the “peace of God” takes us a step farther into His blessings. This does not mean the absence of trials on the outside, but it does mean a quiet confidence within, regardless of circumstances, people, or things.

Daniel gives us a wonderful illustration of peace through prayer. When the king announced that none of his subjects was to pray to anyone except the king, Daniel went to his room, opened his windows, and prayed as before (Dan. 6:1–10). Note how Daniel prayed. He “prayed and gave thanks before his God” (Dan. 6:10) and he made supplication (Dan. 6:11). Prayer—supplication—thanksgiving! And the result was perfect peace *in the midst of difficulty!* Daniel was able to spend the night with the lions in perfect peace, while the king *in his palace* could not sleep (Dan. 6:18).

The first condition for the secure mind and victory over worry is right praying.

Right Thinking (Phil. 4:8)

Peace involves the heart *and the mind*. “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee: because he trusteth in Thee” (Isa. 26:3). Wrong thinking leads to wrong feeling, and before long the heart and mind are pulled apart and we are strangled by worry. We must realize that thoughts are real and powerful, even though they cannot be seen, weighed, or measured. We must bring “into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5).

“Sow a thought, reap an action.

Sow an action, reap a habit.

Sow a habit, reap a character.

Sow a character, reap a destiny!”

Paul spells out in detail the things we ought to think about as Christians.

Whatever is true. Dr. Walter Cavert reported a survey on worry that indicated that only 8 percent of the things people worried about were legitimate matters of concern! The other 92 percent were either imaginary, never happened, or involved matters over which the people had no control anyway. Satan is the liar (John 8:44), and he wants to corrupt our minds with his lies (2 Cor. 11:3). “Yea, hath God said?” is the way he approaches us, just as he approached Eve (Gen. 3:1ff). The Holy Spirit controls our minds through truth (John 17:17; 1 John 5:6), but the devil tries to control them through lies. *Whenever we believe a lie, Satan takes over!*

Whatever is honest and just. This means “worthy of respect and right.” There are many things that are not respectable, and Christians should not think about these things. This does not mean we hide our heads in the sand and avoid what is unpleasant and displeasing, but it does mean we do not focus our attention on dishonorable things and permit them to control our thoughts.

Whatever is pure, lovely, and of good report. “Pure” probably refers to moral purity, since the people then, as now, were constantly attacked by temptations to sexual impurity (Eph. 4:17–24; 5:8–12). “Lovely” means “beautiful, attractive.” “Of good report” means “worth talking about, appealing.” The believer must major on the high and noble thoughts, not the base thoughts of this corrupt world.

Whatever possesses virtue and praise. If it has *virtue*, it will motivate us to do better; and if it has *praise*, it is worth commending to others. No Christian can afford to waste “mind power” on thoughts that tear him down or that would tear others down if these thoughts were shared.

If you will compare this list to David’s description of the Word of God in Psalm 19:7–9, you will see a parallel. The Christian who fills his heart and mind with God’s Word will have a “built-in radar” for detecting wrong thoughts. “Great peace have they which love Thy Law” (Ps. 119:165). Right thinking is the result of daily meditation on the Word of God.

Right Living (Phil. 4:9)

You cannot separate outward action and inward attitude. Sin always results in unrest (unless the conscience is seared), and purity ought to result in peace. “And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and peace” (Isa. 32:17). “But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable” (James 3:17). Right living is a necessary condition for experiencing the peace of God.

Paul balances four activities: “learned and received” and “heard and seen.” It is one thing to *learn* a truth, but quite another to *receive* it inwardly and make it a part of our inner man (see 1 Thes. 2:13). Facts in the head are not enough; we must also have truths in the heart. In Paul’s ministry, he not only *taught* the Word but also *lived* it so that his listeners could see the truth in his life. Paul’s experience ought to be our experience. We must learn the Word, receive it, hear it, and do it. “But be ye doers of the Word, and not hearers only” (James 1:22).

“The peace of God” is one test of whether or not we are in the will of God. “Let the peace that Christ can give keep on acting as umpire in your hearts” (Col. 3:15, WMS). If we are walking with the Lord, then the peace of God and the God of peace exercise their influence over our hearts. Whenever we disobey, we lose that peace and we know we have done something wrong. God’s peace is the “umpire” that calls us “out”!

Right praying, right thinking, and right living: these are the conditions for having the secure mind and victory over worry. As Philippians 4 is the “peace chapter” of the New Testament, James 4 is the “war chapter.” It begins with a question: “From whence come wars and fightings among you?” James explains the causes of war: *wrong praying* (“Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss,” James 4:3), *wrong thinking* (“purify your hearts, ye double-minded,” James 4:8), and *wrong living* (“know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?” James 4:4). There is no middle ground. Either we yield heart and mind to the Spirit of God and practice right praying, thinking, and living; or we yield to the flesh and find ourselves torn apart by worry.

There is no need to worry! And, worry is a sin! (Have you read Matt. 6:24–34 lately?) With the peace of God to guard us and the God of peace to guide us—*why worry?*

THE SECRET OF CONTENTMENT

Philippians 4:10–23

“The trouble with him is that he’s a thermometer and not a thermostat!”

This statement by one of his deacons aroused the pastor’s curiosity. They were discussing possible board members, and Jim’s name had come up.

“Pastor, it’s like this,” the deacon explained. “A thermometer doesn’t change anything around it—it just registers the temperature. It’s always going up and down. But a thermostat regulates the surroundings and changes them when they need to be changed. Jim is a thermometer—he lacks the power to change things. Instead, they change him!”

The Apostle Paul was a thermostat. Instead of having spiritual ups and downs as the situation changed, he went right on, steadily doing his work and serving Christ. His personal references at the close of this letter indicate that he was not the victim of circumstances but the victor over circumstances: “I can accept all things” (Phil. 4:11); “I can do all things” (Phil. 4:13); “I have all things” (Phil. 4:18). Paul did not have to be pampered to be content; he found his contentment in the spiritual resources abundantly provided by Christ.

Contentment is not complacency, nor is it a false peace based on ignorance. The complacent believer is unconcerned about others, while the contented Christian wants to share his blessings. Contentment is not escape from the battle, but rather an abiding peace and confidence in the midst of the battle. “I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content” (Phil. 4:11). Two words in that verse are vitally important—“learned” and “content.”

The verb “learned” means “learned by experience.” Paul’s spiritual contentment was not something he had immediately after he was saved. He had to go through many difficult experiences of life in order to learn how to be content. The word “content” actually means “contained.” It is a description of the man whose resources are within him so that he does not have to depend on substitutes without. The Greek word means “self-sufficient” and was a favorite word of the stoic philosophers. But the Christian is not sufficient in himself; he is sufficient in Christ. Because Christ lives within us, we are adequate for the demands of life.

In this chapter, Paul names three wonderful spiritual resources that make us adequate and give us contentment.

The Overruling Providence of God (Phil. 4:10)

In this day of scientific achievement, we hear less and less about the providence of God. We sometimes get the idea that the world is a vast natural machine and that even God Himself cannot interrupt the wheels as they are turning. But the Word of God clearly teaches the providential workings of God in nature and in the lives of His people. The word “providence” comes from two Latin words: *pro*, meaning “before,” and *video*, meaning “to see.” God’s providence simply means that God sees to it beforehand. It does not mean that God simply *knows* beforehand, because providence involves much more. It is the working of God in advance to arrange circumstances and situations for the fulfilling of His purposes.

The familiar story of Joseph and his brothers illustrates the meaning of providence (Gen. 37–50). Joseph’s brothers envied him and sold him as a slave when he was only seventeen years old. He was taken to Egypt, and there God revealed that seven years of famine were coming after seven years of plenty. It was through Joseph’s interpretation of Pharaoh’s dreams that this fact was discovered. Because of that, Joseph was elevated to the position of second ruler in Egypt. After twenty years of separation, Joseph’s brothers were reconciled to him, and they understood what the Lord had done.

“God did send me before you to preserve life!” said Joseph (Gen. 45:5). “But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good” (Gen. 50:20). This is the providence of God: His hand ruling and overruling in the affairs of life. Paul experienced this divine providence in his life and ministry, and he was able to write, “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them that are the called according to His purpose” (Rom. 8:28). God in His providence had caused the church at Philippi to become concerned about Paul’s needs, and it came at the very time Paul needed their love most! They had been concerned, but they had lacked the opportunity to help. Many Christians today have the opportunities, but they lack the concern!

Life is not a series of accidents; it is a series of appointments. “I will guide thee with Mine eye” (Ps. 32:8). Abraham called God “Jehovah-Jireh,” meaning “the Lord will see to it” (Gen. 22:14). “And when He putteth forth His own sheep, He goeth before them” (John 10:4). This is the providence of God, a wonderful source of contentment.

The Unfailing Power of God (Phil. 4:11–13)

Paul is quick to let his friends know that he is not complaining! His happiness does not depend on circumstances or things; his joy comes from something deeper, something apart from either poverty or prosperity. Most of us have learned how to “be abased,” because when difficulties come we immediately run to the Lord! But few have learned how “to abound.” Prosperity has done more damage to believers than has adversity. “I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing” (Rev. 3:17).

The word “instructed” in Philippians 4:12 is not the same as “learned” in Philippians 4:11. “Instructed” means “initiated into the secret.” This word was used by the pagan religions with reference to their “inner secrets.” Through trial and testing, Paul was “initiated” into the wonderful secret of contentment in spite of poverty or prosperity. “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Phil. 4:13). It was the power of Christ within him that gave him spiritual contentment.

Fog had moved into O’Hare Field, the airport that serves Chicago, and my departure had been delayed. I was sitting in the terminal reading a book and quietly asking God to work out His plans for the trip. Near me was a gentleman waiting for the same plane, but he was pacing up and down like a caged lion, and the language he was using to describe the fog was making the

atmosphere more dense! I thought to myself, “Here is a man without any inner resources.” Later, he asked me how I could be so calm when the planes were all late, and I had the opportunity to share the Gospel with him.

While flying back to Chicago from upper New York via New York City, we had to stay in our holding pattern over Kennedy Airport for more than an hour. When the stewardess announced that we would be landing an hour late, a man across the aisle shouted, “Bring out the booze!” This was his only resource when things were going against him.

All of nature depends on hidden resources. The great trees send their roots down into the earth to draw up water and minerals. Rivers have their sources in the snow-capped mountains. The most important part of a tree is the part you cannot see, the root system, and the most important part of the Christian’s life is the part that only God sees. Unless we draw on the deep resources of God by faith, we fail against the pressures of life. Paul depended on the power of Christ at work in his life (see Phil. 1:6, 21; 2:12–13; 3:10). “I can—through Christ!” was Paul’s motto, and it can be our motto too.

“I am ready for anything through the strength of the One who lives within me,” is the way J.B. Phillips translates Philippians 4:13. *The Living Bible* puts it this way: “I can do everything God asks me to with the help of Christ who gives me the strength and power.” No matter which translation you prefer, they all say the same thing: the Christian has all the power *within* that he needs to be adequate for the demands of life. We need only release this power by faith.

Every Christian ought to read *Hudson Taylor’s Spiritual Secret*, by Dr. and Mrs. Howard Taylor, because it illustrates this principle of inner power in the life of a great missionary to China. For many years, Hudson Taylor worked hard and felt that he was trusting Christ to meet his needs, but somehow he had no joy or liberty in his ministry. Then a letter from a friend opened his eyes to the adequacy of Christ. “It is not by trusting my own faithfulness, but by looking away to the Faithful One!” he said. This was a turning point in his life. Moment by moment, he drew on the power of Christ for every responsibility of the day, and Christ’s power carried him through.

Jesus teaches this same lesson in the sermon on the vine and branches in John 15. He is the Vine; we are the branches. A branch is good only for bearing fruit; otherwise you may as well burn it. The branch does not bear fruit through its own self-effort, but by drawing on the life of the Vine. “Without Me, ye can do nothing” (John 15:5). As the believer maintains his communion with Christ, the power of God is there to see him through. “I am self-sufficient in Christ’s sufficiency” (Phil. 4:13, AMP).

The overruling providence of God and the unfailing power of God are two spiritual resources on which we can draw that we might be adequate for the tasks of life. But there is a third resource.

The Unchanging Promise of God (Phil. 4:14–20)

Paul thanks the church at Philippi for their generous gift. He compares their giving to three very familiar things.

A budding tree (v. 10). The word “flourished” carries the idea of a flower or tree budding or blossoming. Often we go through “winter seasons” spiritually, but then the spring arrives and there is new life and blessing. The tree itself is not picked up and moved; the circumstances are not changed. The difference is *the new life within*.

An investment (vv. 14–17). Paul looked on their missionary gift as an investment that would pay them rich spiritual dividends. The word “communicate” is our familiar word “fellowship.”

The church entered into an arrangement of “giving and receiving”; the church gave *materially* to Paul, and received *spiritually* from the Lord. The Lord keeps the books and will never fail to pay one spiritual dividend! That church is poor that fails to share materially with others.

A sacrifice (v. 18). Paul looked on their gift as a spiritual sacrifice, laid on the altar to the glory of God. There are such things as “spiritual sacrifices” in the Christian life (see 1 Peter 2:5). We are to yield our bodies as spiritual sacrifices (Rom. 12:1–2), as well as the praise of our lips (Heb. 13:15). Good works are a sacrifice to the Lord (Heb. 13:16), and so are the lost souls that we are privileged to win to Christ (Rom. 15:16). Here, Paul sees the Philippian believers as priests, giving their offering as a sacrifice to the Lord. In the light of Malachi 1:6–14, we need to present the very finest that we have to the Lord.

But Paul does not see this gift as simply coming from Philippi. He sees it as the supply of his need from heaven. Paul’s trust was in the Lord. There is an interesting contrast between Philippians 4:18 and 19. We might state it this way if we were to paraphrase Paul: “You met *my* need, and God is going to meet *your* need. You met *one* need that I have, but my God will meet *all* of your needs. You gave out of your *poverty*, but God will supply your needs out of His *riches* in glory!”

God has not promised to supply all our “greeds.” When the child of God is in the will of God, serving for the glory of God, then he will have every need met. Hudson Taylor often said, “When God’s work is done in God’s way for God’s glory, it will not lack for God’s supply.”

A young pastor came to a church that had been accustomed to raising its annual budget by means of suppers, bazaars, and the like. He told his officers he could not agree with their program. “Let’s pray and ask God to meet every need,” he suggested. “At the end of the month, pay all the bills and leave my salary till the last. If there isn’t enough money for my salary, then I’m the one who suffers, and not the church. But I don’t think anybody is going to suffer!” The officers were sure that both the pastor and the church would die, but such was not the case. Each month every bill was paid, and at the end of the year there was a surplus in the treasury for the first time in many years.

Contentment comes from adequate resources. Our resources are the providence of God, the power of God, and the promises of God. These resources made Paul sufficient for every demand of life, and they can make us sufficient too.

Lightner, R. P. (1985). *Philippians*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 663-665) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books

IV. Enablement for Living the Christian Life (4:1–23).

A. *Christ at the center* (4:1–7)

Paul’s love for the Philippians, which is evident throughout this letter, is especially apparent in the opening verses of chapter 4. One of his chief concerns was that these people would be characterized by the fruit of the Spirit. Love, joy, and peace were uppermost in his heart and mind for them. In order to experience these Christian graces Christ must be at the center of a believer’s life. Paul made this plain as he wrote to the saints at Philippi.

1. STANDING FAST IN HIM (4:1–3)

In these verses the apostle first gave a general plea for unity and steadfastness and then a specific plea to two women.

4:1. **Therefore** introduces this exhortation and applies what he wrote in chapter 3 about sanctification and glorification. The apostle's affection for this congregation is revealed by his love and longing for them and his calling them his **brothers** (cf. "brothers" in 1:12; 3:1, 13, 17; 4:8), his **joy and crown** (*stephanos*, the runner's wreath or victor's crown; cf. 1 Thes. 2:19–20), and his **dear friends** (cf. Phil. 2:12). These saints were to their spiritual father what victory wreaths were to runners in the Greek races. The believers were exhorted to **stand firm in the Lord** (cf. 1:27, where Paul urged the same steadfastness).

4:2. Two women, **Euodia** and **Syntyche**, did not live up to the meanings of their names. "Euodia" means a "prosperous journey." "Syntyche" means a "pleasant acquaintance." Since Paul pleaded with these two **to agree with each other in the Lord**, it seems that they were causing dissension in the assembly. This helps explain Paul's earlier plea for unity (2:1–4).

4:3. At one time Euodia and Syntyche **contended** at Paul's **side in the cause of the gospel**. But as he wrote they were not in harmony with each other. They were contentious, rather than content.

The exact identity of Paul's **loyal yokefellow** is not known. Some say "yokefellow" (*syzygus*) is a proper name. Paul knew he could count on him to work with the women and bring them back to fellowship with each other and with the Lord. **Clement** and other **fellow workers** had also contended for the gospel with these women. (This is more likely than supposing the words "along with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers" go with "help," as though Paul were enlisting Clement and others to help Syzygus unite the women.)

2. REJOICING IN HIM (4:4)

4:4. Sometimes the trials and pressures of life make it almost impossible to be happy. But Paul did not tell his readers to be happy. He encouraged them to **rejoice in the Lord**. In fact, he said it twice in verse 4 (cf. 3:1; 1 Thes. 5:16). Christ is the One in whom the sphere of rejoicing was to take place. Surely there are many circumstances in which Christians cannot be happy. But they can always rejoice in the Lord and delight in Him. Paul himself was an excellent example of one who had inner joy when external circumstances—such as persecution, imprisonment, the threat of death—were against him.

3. LIVING IN THE LIGHT OF HIS PRESENCE (4:5–7)

4:5. In addition to joy, believers are to have **gentleness**, which is to **be evident to all**. *Epieikes* ("gentleness") suggests a forbearing, nonretaliatory spirit. Joy, an inner quality in relation to circumstances, may not always be seen; but the way one reacts to others—whether in gentleness or harshness—will be noticed. Why be gentle? Because **the Lord is near**. This probably refers to the Rapture, not to His presence with His own at all times.

4:6–7. Joy and gentleness (vv. 4–5), accompanied with an awareness of Christ's imminent return, should dispel anxiety. Paul's appeal to the Philippians is **do not be anxious about anything**. But this was not a call to a carefree life. To care and be genuinely concerned is one thing. To worry is another. Paul and Timothy cared for the people they ministered to (2 Cor. 11:28; Phil. 2:20), yet they retained trust in God. Jesus warned against worry which obviously eliminates trust in God (Matt. 6:25–33).

Paul exhorted the Philippians to prayer instead of anxiety. Praying with thanksgiving involves trusting God. Four words are used here to describe a believer's communion with God. **Prayer** (*proseuchē*) describes a believer's approach to God. **Petition** (*deēsei*) emphasizes requesting an answer to a specific need. **Thanksgiving** (*eucharistias*) is an attitude of heart which should always accompany one's prayers. **Requests** (*aitēmata*) speak of definite and specific things asked for.

When the exhortations of verses 4–6 are heeded, **the peace of God** (v. 7) will flood one's troubled soul. The Lord Jesus Christ is a believer's peace (Eph. 2:14), and every child of God has peace *with* God through justification by faith (Rom. 5:1). But the peace *of* (or from) God relates to the inner tranquility of a believer's close walk with God.

This peace of God **transcends all understanding**, that is, it is beyond man's ability to comprehend. This peace guards the believers. **Guard** (*phroureōsei*, also used in 1 Peter 1:5) translates a military term which means "to protect or garrison by guarding." Like soldiers assigned to watch over a certain area, God's peace garrisons the **hearts and ... minds**, that is, the emotions and thoughts, of God's children.

B. God's presence with believers (4:8–9).

1. THINKING WORTHY THOUGHTS (4:8)

4:8. By the word **finally** Paul indicated he was about to conclude the section. Six items are mentioned as objects of a wholesome thought life, and each one is introduced with **whatever**. In the Greek "whatever" is plural, which suggests that several things could be included under each heading.

True (*alēthē*) things are of course the opposite of dishonest and unreliable things (cf. Eph. 4:15, 25). **Noble** refers to what is dignified and worthy of respect (this word *semna* is used in the NT only here and in 1 Tim. 3:8, 11; Titus 2:2). **Right** refers to conformity to God's standards. **Pure** (*hagna*) refers to what is wholesome, not mixed with moral impurity. **Lovely** (*prophilē*, occurring only here in the NT) speaks of what promotes peace rather than conflict. **Admirable** (*euphēma*, also used only here) relates to what is positive and constructive rather than negative and destructive.

These six objects of thought are then described as **excellent** (*aretē*) and **praiseworthy** (*epainos*).

2. DOING WORTHY DEEDS (4:9)

4:9. The Christian life involves proper thinking (v. 8), but it also includes doing righteous deeds.

Since the Philippians knew Paul well, he could ask them to follow his example. They had **learned ... received** and **heard from** him, and they had even **seen** the apostle's conduct. As they **put** these things (from Paul's teaching and living) **into practice**, they would enjoy the presence of **the God of peace** (cf. "the peace of God," v. 7).

C. God's supply of human needs (4:10–20).

Epaphroditus was the messenger the Philippians sent to bring their gift to Paul (4:18). It appears that Paul wrote this letter as both a thank-you note and as a word of greeting and exhortation. The apostle could certainly testify that God does supply His people's needs.

1. THE LESSON OF CONTENTMENT (4:10–13)

4:10–13. Paul’s heart was made glad (**I rejoice greatly in the Lord**) because of the continued interest the Philippian Christians showed in him. They had not forgotten him; through them God had met his needs. Even before they sent Epaphroditus they were concerned but **had no opportunity to show it**.

Paul did not beg God’s people to help him in his work. He just placed the need before them and trusted God to meet it. Too, he had learned the lesson of contentment. Changing circumstances did not affect the inner contentment he enjoyed. The word **content** (*autarkēs*) means “self-sufficient.” The Stoics used this word (which occurs only here in the NT) to mean human self-reliance and fortitude, a calm acceptance of life’s pressures. But Paul used it to refer to a *divinely* bestowed sufficiency, **whatever the circumstances**.

At times Paul experienced definite financial and material needs, and at other times he had an abundance (v. 12). He learned how to cope with both **need** and **plenty**. The words **I have learned the secret** translate *memyēmai* (from *myēō*), which occurs only here in the New Testament. In the mystery religions it was a technical term meaning “to initiate (into the mysteries).” Paul used it here to suggest a kind of “initiation” (by his experiences) into being content when either **well fed or hungry**, and either **in plenty or in want**.

Paul said he could **do everything**—including handling poverty and living in abundance—**through Him who** gave him **strength**. This was not an expression of pride in his own abilities but a declaration of the strength provided by Christ.

2. THE BLESSING OF GIVING AND RECEIVING (4:14–20)

4:14–16. Though Paul was content no matter what the circumstances, he was nevertheless grateful for the help the Philippians sent with Epaphroditus.

Because they gave of their means they shared with the apostle in his **troubles**; they did something about his problem.

In the very beginning of their Christian experience (Acts 16) when Paul left Macedonia they alone shared with him **in the matter of giving and receiving**. And again when Paul was in Thessalonica on his second missionary journey (Acts 17:1) and experienced definite need, the Philippians **sent him aid** twice.

4:17–20. Others were always uppermost in Paul’s mind. He was not **looking for a gift** simply to satisfy his own needs. He wanted credit to come to the **account** of the Philippians.

Since these people had already helped him so much, Paul did not want them to think he was still looking for more from them. He had received from the Philippians full payment, all the money they had sent, so he was then abounding and was **amply supplied**. What they had sent with Epaphroditus (2:25–30) had an effect on both him and God, for the gifts were a **fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God**. The term “fragrant offering” was used in Leviticus (in the LXX) for an offering that pleased God. It also was used in Ephesians 5:2 of Christ’s offering of Himself.

God would reciprocate to the Philippians. They had met Paul’s needs and now God would meet theirs. God would not only bless them *out of* or *from* His bounty but also *in accordance with* (*kata*) it: **according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus**.

To our God—his heavenly Father and theirs—the apostle gave thanks and praise.

D. Conclusion (4:21–23).

4:21–23. Final greetings came to the Philippians from Paul, from his fellow workers, and from other believers.

The apostle sent his greetings from **all the saints** (v. 21). He addressed “all the saints” (1:1) in writing the epistle. The **brothers** who were with Paul also sent greetings. Timothy was certainly included in this group. **The saints** (v. 22) who sent greetings were those in the church in Rome (Rom. 16:1–15).

Those who belong to Caesar’s household (Phil. 4:22) were probably those who had come to Christ as a result of Paul’s house arrest. They probably included soldiers and relatives of Caesar’s household. No wonder Paul could say that what had happened to him had advanced the gospel (1:12).

As was his usual practice Paul gave great prominence to Christ’s marvelous **grace** as he concluded his letter (cf. Phile. 25).

*Dockery, D. S. (1998). **The Pauline Letters In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), Holman Concise Bible Commentary (p. 585). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.***

CHRISTIAN MATURITY (3:12–4:1)

Like an athlete who does not waste time looking around or looking back, Paul exerted his all-out effort to reach the finish line of Christian maturity. He did not presume to have attained perfection and therefore fully pursued the goal of God’s upward call in Christ Jesus. He likewise called for the Philippians to move forward in their Christian lives.

Simultaneously in this exhortation he strongly denounced the false teachings of careless living, on the one hand, and spiritual perfectionism on the other. He appealed for unity and maturity by reminding them that they were citizens of heaven. Because the Philippians were intensely proud of their Roman citizenship, they would have quickly grasped all that Paul meant. Finally, he reminded them that they would be transformed at the coming again of the Lord Jesus Christ.

JOY AND PEACE (4:2–9)

There was some hint of division in the church. Paul appealed to Euodia and Syntyche to agree with each other and for the entire church to stand firm in the Lord. Paul offered them a prescription for receiving God’s peace, to rejoice in the Lord, and to let their thoughts be filled with that which is good, lovely, and true.

THANKSGIVING (4:10–20)

Paul rejoiced and offered thanksgiving for the Philippians’ generous care for him. He had learned to be satisfied in whatever situation he found himself in the Lord’s service. This word of contentment and thanksgiving came from a man in prison facing death, a man who had been beaten, stoned, and hounded by his enemies. The basis for such contentment was found in his confidence that he could do everything through Christ who gave him strength (4:13). Paul commended them for their generosity. From the first, even at great cost to themselves, they had shared with the apostle. In all of this Paul displayed his attitude toward material things and urged them to realize that God would meet all their needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

CONCLUSION (4:21–23)

Paul concluded his letter with a benediction and personal greetings. He also sent greetings from Caesar's household, which included Christian members of the emperor's staff.

Theological Significance. In this letter we learn the importance of church unity (1:27–30) and Christian humility (2:1–4). Christ's humility serves as the basis of Christian humility, which is the key for genuine Christian unity. Paul's suffering during his imprisonment also serves as a foundation for teaching abasement and humility (1:12–18; 4:10–13). Alongside abasement and suffering is joy, the great theme of the letter. In all of life's circumstances believers can experience joy. For it is in suffering and sacrifice that true joy is found. Paul's exhortation to rejoice is a much-needed and practical word for believers at all times in all situations.

Fields, W. C. (1972). *Philippians*. In H. F. Paschall & H. H. Hobbs (Eds.), *The Teacher's Bible Commentary* (pp. 751-752). Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers.

Challenges (Phil. 4:1–9)

After the long digression in chapter 3 in which he warns against the Judaizers, Paul returns here to the subject of dissention among the Philippians. The church which began with a woman, Lydia, as the first convert, seems now to have its first trouble because of two women, Euodia and Syntyche. He appeals (4:3) to an unnamed colleague to help them work out their differences. One Clement is also mentioned by name. While he does not specify others, they can be assured that their names "are in the book of life."

Paul commends "the peace of God" to them (vv. 4–7). How does it come about? Rejoice! Be moderate! Don't be overanxious! Pray! Give thanks! Lay your petitions before God!

"Finally, brethren" (v. 8)—he attempts to conclude again! But exhortations pour forth. He suggests eight proper subjects for their meditation, They seem to be arranged in a descending scale. These are followed (v. 9) by proper lines of action.

Appreciation (Phil. 4:10–20)

Paul thanks them for their financial support (v. 10). He makes clear, however, (vv. 11–13) that he is not seeking such. He has learned to make do with whatever resources are at hand. He has confidence that Christ will strengthen him sufficiently for every task.

These faithful friends at Philippi had been loyal supporters of his needs. The gift they sent to him in prison by Epaphroditus (v. 18) was especially meaningful and appropriate. He expresses his confidence that in Christ all of their own needs would be supplied.

Conclusion (Phil. 4:20–23)

This epistle of love and friendship closes with a benediction. In the midst of this, however, he inserts a personal greeting to each of the members of the church. Likewise, he passes on to them the greetings of the believers in Rome. He refers to the fact that this includes Christians "that are of Caesar's household." These seem to be civil servants rather than members of Caesar's family. The concluding word is a prayer.

**The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). Philippians 4. Grand Rapids, MI:
Zondervan.**

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