



GOSPEL  
*partnership*

DEVOTIONALS 8

# PHILIPPIANS 4:2-9

<sup>2</sup> I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord.

<sup>3</sup> Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.

<sup>4</sup> Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. <sup>5</sup> Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; <sup>6</sup> do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

<sup>8</sup> Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. <sup>9</sup> What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

# DAY 1

PHILIPPIANS 4:2-3

<sup>2</sup> I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. <sup>3</sup> Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.

Over the years, folks have looked at esoteric, philosophical arguments such as "first cause" to prove the existence of God, but it has been posited that one of the true proofs for the existence of God is the continuing testimony of the church. The fact that disparate, obviously sinful people can continue to operate with some semblance of unity must mean there is a God!

Manifesting the reality of God is one of the reasons Paul returns to the theme of unity (cf. Phil. 2:1-11) so strongly and so particularly here in these opening verses of chapter 4. There are several things that are worth reflecting on here. First, imagine the surprise of Euodia and Syntyche at having their names read publicly in the letter/sermon. These are women who are known in the church, have labored side by side with Paul, who have their names written in the book of life, are leaders in the church. But they are also women who are in some sort of conflict. Good people can get caught up in conflict. And by calling out these two women in particular, Paul is saying you need to work this out. It is important for you. It is important for the testimony of the church.

Some of you will remember in our First Things class that we highlight the importance of this unity with the following thoughts as we round off our commitments as members of Christ's body:

*Because the church is full of sinful people (including me), I commit to actively pursue reconciliation with those who will inevitably hurt and offend me and with those I will inevitably hurt and offend. I covenant not to leave or withdraw from the church or any individual without first pursuing Biblical reconciliation. I will not gossip or slander or forsake a personal relationship because of conflict—but instead will seek, as much as it depends upon me, to be a redemptive maker of peace—and in so doing to support the peace of the church—because the Gospel calls me to nothing less than this.*

Second, note how Paul calls on the "true companion" to aid these women in finding peace. We do not know the identity of this person; it may even be a way of addressing the whole church. But we do see that it is our job as fellow Christians to be a catalyst for communion rather than a stimulus for separation. But how do we do this?

The short answer to the above question is we keep our eyes on Jesus. The longer answer can be found when we note that this conflict is not named. Paul is not really concerned with *what* they are disagreeing about. He is not particularly concerned with taking sides or making judgments on who is right and who is wrong. What he is concerned about is that they agree in **the Lord**. This is the application shorthand for all that he was exhorting the Philippians to in chapter 2. Have this mind in you that is yours in Christ Jesus. Consider others' interests before your own. Have the same love. Do nothing from selfish ambition, but in humility consider others better than yourself (cf. 2:1-5). Paul is driving people toward Christ as he drives them toward one another. This is not a unity without truth. Rather this is a unity founded on the One who is truth. This is a unity that makes manifest the reality of God!

## PRAYER of Jesus

*"I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me before the foundation of the world."* John 17:20-24

-Andrew VanderMaas

# DAY 2

PHILIPPIANS 4:4-7

<sup>4</sup> Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. <sup>5</sup> Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; <sup>6</sup> do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Because Paul is addressing his friends/fellow believers in the context of their actual lives, he does not cover up the conflict happening in the Philippian church. This choice shines a light on one of Satan's favorite tactics; he comes as an angel of light, using God's Word as a book of ideals and timeless truths for good people to live up to. Have you not felt the temptation to lift yourself out and above a situation to make a judgment on what someone should do? This allows us to feel righteous without taking the risk of making a wrong or costly choice. It reduces God to an abstract principle and invites us to a faith-walk that will not require anything relationally. Instead, Paul identifies with the imperfect people he loves and helps them use their disagreement to grow in Christlikeness.

Our passage for today addresses all the believers at Philippi in their experience of resolving a conflict. Tuesday and Wednesday meditations will focus on the practical ways to do this, using verses 5 and 6. Today, we will look at the bookends, verses 4 and 7, to see how joy and peace fit together. Paul's admonition to rejoice follows a thread that starts in the beginning of his letter where he says he always prays for them with joy. The words "joy" or "rejoice" are woven throughout the book a number of times. Today we read, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice." Paul orients us to the simplicity that has emerged from the complexity of his life.

When we hear the prefix "re," we understand we are not being introduced to something new but are being called back to something we have known or experienced. Think about these words:

*remind*—bring back to mind

*revive*—bring back to life

*reconstruct*—build back

*Rejoice*, then, means being called back to joy, which leads us to ask, What is joy?

The culture around us usually thinks of joy as a euphoric feeling to be pursued. But citizens of God's kingdom know that feelings follow beliefs. Isn't this why Paul could rejoice in the middle of opposition and suffering? Singing in prison is not a natural response. Paul did not pursue joy; he pursued Christ and found himself joyful because joy is the fruit of being alive in Christ.

Now we can rest, free from the anxiety that accompanies trusting in what is temporary and unstable. Paul must have seen that this was the core issue of the two women at Philippi. Bringing them back to joy—to life in Christ—would be the antidote to their restlessness and would bring peace. Paul describes this peace in three ways: first, it is from God, not from the world; second, it transcends what can be understood from our human perspective; third, it guards our minds like a sentinel against the lies of the enemy as he works to bring division and destruction.

Most of us don't have to look far to find a place of restlessness or conflict where we can practice what Paul is teaching. How can we return to joy in our marriages and families? How can we live in peace as a church family with strong differences? How can we be light in a dark, dark world? There is only one source. God does not dispense love, joy, or peace as separate commodities; he gives us Jesus. Everything is in him, and there is enough for everyone. Rejoice!

## PRAYER

*Oh Lord, we are the weak and heavy-laden souls hearing your invitation to come for rest. We are weary of the unrelenting discord everywhere. We are weary of our own stubborn ways. We confess again that our life is in you. Jesus, you are our joy! Thank you for loving us! Teach us to love each other. Lift us to your joy, and fill us with your peace. Amen*

-Judy Vander Ark

# DAY 3

PHILIPPIANS 4:5

Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand.

In an age filled with divisions, Paul provides some words of wisdom for how to interact with each other when we don't agree. In addressing the strife between Euodia and Syntyche, Paul calls for us to be reasonable. This isn't a reference back to the philosophical notion of reason but to the character of our interactions with others. Here, reasonableness could also be translated as "graciousness," "fairness," or "with respect." Paul isn't taking sides in the argument but wants them to work out their differences with a graciousness towards one another.

In our current climate, this is clearly not the norm. Instead, social media is filled with disdain for the other side. Paul calls us to respect one another, and I think that includes listening. The problem is that most of the mediums we use to express our differences are not conducive to listening. A better way is to sit down for a meal or for coffee, hear the other person's side, and work through your differences. Even though you may not come to an agreement, this is a reasonable and gracious way to engage with one another.

This is important because others see how we engage with each other. I remember posting an angry response to a friend of mine on Facebook that resulted in several people unfriending me. The good news is that we worked out our differences over coffee and were able to see each other's perspectives even though we didn't reconcile our disagreements. These divisions also damage our witness. Those outside the church see how we interact with one another and are not going to be drawn to the gospel if they see us attacking one another. This is a call for us to examine how we interact with others and in particular those with whom we disagree.

## PRAYER

*Lord of creation, help me to see all people as made in your image. Give me a gracious, compassionate, and reasonable heart. Give me the patience to listen to others. Let your Spirit give me wisdom in my relationships and discernment in the words I use. I pray that your graciousness will be a witness to those around me. Amen.*

-Jerry Stutzman

# DAY 4

PHILIPPIANS 4:5-6

<sup>5</sup>The Lord is at hand; <sup>6</sup> do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

In dire situations where no solution is to be found, there are few things more hopeful than to find out that “help is on the way.” This is Paul’s logic too. In the face of persecution, discord, external and internal strife—all things that we have seen so far in this letter—Paul begins his great encouragement with a statement that “the Lord is at hand.”

In fact, this phrase serves a dual purpose. He supports his command to rejoicing and reasonableness with the truth that God is near (verse 5). Yet, for Paul, God’s presence—his immanence—does not merely demand a list of commands. “The Lord is at hand” is an invitation to draw near to God as he has drawn near to us.

Therefore, Paul has the boldness to say, “Do not be anxious about anything.” Bible commentator Walter Hansen talks about how the Greek grammar indicates that Paul is telling them to stop something that they were “habitually doing.” Because God has drawn near—in fact, the fullness of his power and presence was pleased to dwell in Jesus, whose very Spirit fills the hearts of his saints—all of our anxious presumptions lose their grip. Instead of minds racing and sweaty palms desperately searching for help, the gospel tells us that in everything we are to cast our cares on Jesus, our Rock.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, there is the well-known call to “rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances.” Some of you may wonder how it’s humanly possible to actually pray without ceasing? This makes a good point: our minds are fickle. One of my mentors once told me that if you know how to be anxious, then you know how to abide in prayer. In other words, if you battle with anxious thoughts, then you already have the neural pathways to pray without ceasing. We can take the inward dread of anxiety’s downward spiral up to the Lord. In our every anxious thought, we can choose not to let worry have the last word. Instead, we can cast it all on God and let our requests be made known to him.

*Come, ye sinners, poor and needy,  
weak and wounded, sick and sore;  
Jesus ready stands to save you,  
full of pity, love, and power.*

*Let not conscience make you linger,  
nor of fitness fondly dream;  
all the fitness he requireth  
is to feel your need of him.*



# PRAYER

*Father in heaven, in every trouble, in every sadness, in every battle, remind us that Jesus our helper has come. Remind us, dear God, that the Spirit of Christ is here to bind up our hearts and carry our anxious requests before your throne. Remind us that Jesus declared, "It is finished" so that we may never have to worry about what will come of us again. Thank you that our redemption is secure in him. In Jesus's name, we pray. Amen.*

G. Walter Hansen, Pillar Commentary: Philippians

-Masakuni Hotta

# DAY 5

PHILIPPIANS 4:8-9

<sup>8</sup> Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. <sup>9</sup> What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

Philippians 4:8 reminds me of a song we learned long ago in Sunday school: *O Be Careful, Little Eyes*.

*O be careful little eyes what you see  
For the Father up above  
Is looking down in love  
So, be careful little eyes what you see*

If you're not familiar with this song, other verses repeat the basic phrase with "ears what you hear, hands what you do, feet where you go, tongue what you say, mind what you think."

Philippians 4:8 is the adult version of much the same idea, but here we get a more comprehensive explanation of why this "careful" behavior is right and important. We see this if we back up and go through previous chapters in the letter. The first chapter reminds us that our conduct as citizens of heaven needs to be above reproach as we represent the heavenly kingdom to those around us. The second chapter reminds us that the unity of the church is a direct result of how we treat each other, and that we get to unity by thinking together like Christ. The third chapter reminds us that boasting in anything but Christ sows problems and that looking forward and pulling together in Christ is one of the primary ways the church gets through the suffering that is inevitable for believers.

Philippians 4:8 reinforces the rest of the book with more specific descriptions of what our behavior should look like. Those behaviors are consistent with a pattern of thinking and acting that is Christlike. We should be working for unity among the people of the church, thinking of others as being better than ourselves, being tender and compassionate, and working toward having one mind and purpose.

This letter is unified in its thought—both in what is said explicitly and in Paul’s examples of how he loves and treats people. We cannot afford to miss or ignore the message: What we watch, what we listen to, how we think, and what we say is important not only for our own lives but also for the life of the church. The application is unmistakable. How much do we allow critical media input to influence our thinking? How much do we repeat inappropriate comments that we hear? How much do we let negative comments about people or even name-calling creep into our conversations?

Paul is asking for the behavior in our lives to be Christlike. That behavior is not a mysterious list or abstract or some kind of pie in the sky. It is very concrete and definite. May we consider the way we think, listen, and talk and in the process become more dependent on scripture for input and less dependent on the TV and the internet. The basic question is pretty simple: *What do we want to shape us the most?*

## PRAYER

*Father, we live in an incredibly contentious world. The only way we can live peacefully and constructively in it is by following the patterns our Lord set. Help us to understand those patterns and make practical choices in our lives that keep us on that right pathway.*

-Richard Malone

