

## No Matter What

### Philippians 4:4-7

*Introduction:* A little over a week ago, I ran across an email in my inbox that I would like to share with you. Usually our email filter at church catches all the spam, but in God's providence this particular message slipped through. The subject is: "Biblical cure shocks doctors." The email reads like this:

This Biblical health secret has already been used by more than 10,270 Americans...And the results they are reporting are SHOCKING. Folks are seeing their blood sugar levels stabilize... getting of their insulin... and trashing their expensive prescriptions... All because of this forgotten passage in the Bible. In this passage, along with several others... Jesus tells us EXACTLY how to heal virtually any disease... And all it takes is some natural and inexpensive ingredients...Along with following His specific instructions.

The email goes on, but I will spare you the nonsense. This email promises nothing short of a miracle for people physically—whatever your disease or physical problem, just follow these Bible verses exactly along with taking the right ingredients, and you will be healed! In fact, there are whole movements in Christianity that offer this promise—if you just had enough faith, if you prayed the right way, if you could get more of the Holy Spirit, then your cousin's cancer would be gone, your cat would perk up, your knee would stop aching. And we feel as if we have little faith when we fail in our prayers.

But is that in fact what the Bible promises? No, it is not. The Bible actually promises a greater miracle. But what could be greater than physical healing? The greater miracle is to find someone who has joy in spite of their pain. It is a greater miracle to find someone who patiently endures suffering. The greater miracle is to find a person who has peace in the midst of their storm. And that is what God wants to do for us. The Bible teaches us the reality that **no matter what happens, Christ is more than enough.** In any and every circumstance, Christ can give you three character traits that this world cannot offer—Christ can give you joy. Christ can give you endurance. And Christ can give you peace. How is this possible? Let's look together at how this works in verse 4...

#### I. **No matter what happens, Christ can give you joy. (vs. 4) <sup>4</sup> Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.**

##### A. **God's Command—Rejoice!**

- i. Let's keep in mind the context of this command. Paul has just exhorted two women in the Philippian church, Euodia and Syntyche to agree in the Lord. He exhorts not only the women, but the entire church, to work together as people who are citizens of God's kingdom. No one has arrived, we are reminded in chapter three, and because Jesus has paid it all we owe Him our all. HE is the priceless treasure we pursue. So we can obey this command by God's grace through Christ Jesus.
- ii. However, the world and Satan often try to rob us of our joy. The Philippians church was in danger of losing their joy—that's why Paul gives this command. But why, why was it so hard for the Philippians to rejoice at this particular time? Well, they faced pressure not only from the inside with situations like that of Euodia and Syntyche, but also from outside the church.
  1. In chapter three, Paul dealt with the threat of Jewish legalism. Religious rulers, who seemed to have a corner on truth, could tempt the Philippians to rely on their own dead works instead of pursuing Christ. These false teachers followed Paul around and tried to sabotage his efforts.
  2. In chapter two Paul reminds the Philippians that they live in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation—they are shining lights in a dark world. And really, Paul's own letter reminds them of this reality because Paul writes

from prison. Paul was not merely threatened—he was being persecuted. And this same Philippian church witnessed Paul’s sufferings when he and Silas were beaten with rods and imprisoned for casting a demon out of a slave girl.

3. Why all the pressure on Christians? In the case of Paul and Silas, these were the charges leveled against them: **“These men are Jews, and they are disturbing our city. They advocate customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to accept or practice.” Acts 16:20b-21** You may remember that the city of Philippi was “a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony” (Acts 16:12). The Philippians, though not living on Italian soil, were considered part of a Roman colony. Philippi was an important, flourishing city in their district, and the people were proud of that fact. When Paul goes from city to city, at seemingly every place the Jews or someone else end up causing an uproar over his teaching. And the Romans did not like disorder or chaos within the empire. Depending on how the magistrates responded, the issue could be resolved on the spot or go to a higher authority—like what we read happened at Philippi. But the situation was about to grow worse. Three years after the writing of this letter, in 64 AD, a great fire would ravish the city of Rome. And the empire of Rome under the administration of Nero blames it all on the Christians. And what has been seething under the surface now explodes in Rome. And while the persecution at the time of Nero focused primarily on Rome, it set the stage for an empire-wide persecution.
4. So these Philippian believers are living under tension and stress as they feel the increasing pressure from both the Jews and the Romans. How could they possibly experience joy in such circumstances?

*Illustration:* Perhaps you know the feeling on a much smaller scale. It’s like going to the store in the winter just before a predicted ice-storm hits us here in Greenville, SC. Just go and look at the bread aisle! If you get there late enough, all the bread is gone. People have stocked their pantries with all these essential items because when the storm hits, you don’t want to be out on those icy roads. It’s a bit eerie and strange, really, to see all the shelves empty. The traffic on the roads begins to thin out. And we get ready hunker down and bundle up in case the power goes out.

5. These Philippian believers were bracing for the storm. The first icy drops had fallen, and the winter chill of persecution was setting in. And what does Paul say? *“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.”*
  - iii. This is not a new statement in the book. Paul has repeatedly expressed his own joy in God’s work and called the Philippians to deeper joy in God. He commands the Philippians to rejoice, not just when it is convenient, not just when they feel good, not just when everything is going their way—rather, they are to rejoice “always.”
  - iv. This kind of joy transcends circumstances, it abides and remains no matter what happens. But we look at a command like that, and along with the Philippians we think, “Is that really what you mean, Paul? Because I can think of a lot reasons why rejoicing doesn’t make sense right now.” But Paul, reemphasizes the point by saying it again—“Again I will say, rejoice.” God knows there is a battle that rages in our hearts concerning this very issue.
  - v. The paradox of this verse is that God commands us to rejoice. We tend to think joy is not something to be commanded out of us, but rather something that flows from us in response to circumstances. If my circumstances are great, then joy will flow. If

things go my way, then joy will flow. If I have control, then joy will flow. But God never commands something without also providing the grace to obey. We can have joy that transcends circumstances. How? By focusing on...

### B. God's Salvation—in the Lord

- i. And in the text, God highlights His grace by three simple words—"in the Lord." We rejoice in the Lord. And if you would glance up at end of the verse just preceding, verse 3, notice that Paul has just talked about his fellow workers whose names are in where? The book of life. The phrase "book of life" is clearly a reference to salvation—those workers were saved by God's grace, and in the Lord, so are we. And through salvation, we experience a relationship with Jesus Christ that unlocks all the power and privileges that come with knowing God. And the reality of our salvation is a cause for great joy—the kind of joy that transcends circumstances.
- ii. "But," you may say, "my circumstances *are* miserable. I feel awful. I have looked to God's promises, and while others around me seem to find answers to their prayer, I have none. I cannot find relief."

*Illustration:* The book of Psalms gives 150 chapters of pure praise to God. Can you guess what type of Psalm occurs most often? The lament. Over two thirds, or 66% of the book of Psalms, is filled with laments. A lament is simply when a person comes before God and reality does not seem to correspond to Scripture. And I wrestle through the apparent contradiction in honest prayer with God—I cry, I question, I plea and then—I submit. I come back around, and after pouring out my heart before God I reaffirm trust in a sovereign God who knows all. And really, the whole book of Psalms follows this pattern. The first half of the book is front-loaded with lament Psalms and the second half is stacked up with praise and thanksgiving. And you know what God calls that process? God calls it praise! That is joy. A pleasing pain, as one author has put it, that transcends all circumstances because in the end it affirms faith in God.

*Application:* The reality is that if we trust in the Lord, we are saved by Jesus Christ. The battle is won. Satan is a defeated enemy. And no circumstance, no unpleasant pain, no trial can pluck me out of the Father's hand. As the hymn writer said, "Pain or loss or shame or cross will not from my Savior move me, since He chose to love me."<sup>1</sup> God *can* command us to rejoice in the Lord because the gospel, properly understood, leads us to joy.

*Illustration:* While Paul was imprisoned and still awaiting the outcome of his trial, some people took full advantage of his absence and sought to preach Christ out of envy. Yet his testimony in chapter 1 is one of pure joy. Paul attitude was "**as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing.**" **2 Corinthians 6:10** Why? Because no one could touch his relationship with the Lord Jesus. And Jesus would accomplish his purpose in spite of opposition. No matter what happened, Paul knew Christ was more than enough. The same is true for us—joy in sorrow is possible through the eyes of faith. And as you look to the grace God provides in Christ, you will find the strength to rejoice.

*Transition:* Just as God commands us to rejoice in every circumstance, He also commands us to patiently endure in every circumstance. If we look at verse 5, we find that...

## II. **No matter what happens, Christ can give you endurance. (vs. 5) <sup>5</sup>Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand;**

### A. God's Command—Endure

- i. This verse makes it clear Paul was thinking of the Philippians endurance specifically through persecution from the world around them. This word "reasonableness" has the idea of patiently enduring under distress or trial specifically caused by other

<sup>1</sup> Jesus, Priceless Treasure. Words by Johann Franck. Translation by Catherine Winkworth.

*people*. And Paul does not say “Let your reasonableness be known to your brothers and sisters, to other believers,” he says to let it be known to “everyone.” While this includes the church, it opens the application up to the way the world treats believers. And this Philippian church would have understood what Paul meant. They suffered much at the hands of the Jews and the Romans. We already talked about the disruptions caused by enemies of Christianity, but there were also other reasons Christians suffered persecution.

1. In a Roman society where Caesar worship was often enforced, exclusive worship of Jesus alone was taboo. It wasn't that worshipping Jesus was such a big deal, it was worshipping Jesus *alone* that created problems for Christians. You could say it was “unpatriotic.” After all, Jesus was put to death at the hands of a Roman governor under charges of claiming to be a king. Church historian Everett Ferguson notes that “early Christians appeared to be obstinate. The Roman governor Pliny the Younger complained of this: It seemed such a simple thing (from a Roman point of view) to burn a pinch of incense on an altar or swear by the emperor, but this was something that committed Christians would not do. Such obstinacy a totalitarian government cannot endure. Under such a regime, the supreme virtue is obedience to the duly constituted authorities.”<sup>2</sup> It's not a big deal, the Romans say! Get over it, stubborn Christian.
2. In addition, Christians were the objects of slanderous gossip. They were accused of atheism, cannibalism, and incest. Once again, Ferguson says, “Atheism in the ancient world was practical, not theoretical. An atheist was someone who did not observe the traditional religious practices, regardless of what faith he professed.”<sup>3</sup> The charges of cannibalism and incest both may have arisen from a misunderstanding of the Lord's Supper. They eat the body and blood of Jesus? Cannibals. They have love feasts? I bet incest is involved. Idolatry so permeated that culture that early Christians took great care to avoid many of the cultural practices of the Romans. So Romans didn't always know what Christians were doing, and stealing bits and pieces of truth, they would fill in the gaps with juicy details that maligned the character of Christians. And the Jews took advantage of this problem—they did not hesitate to let the government know just how different they were from “those Christians.”
  - ii. Can you see why God would command these Philippians to patiently endure? But how? How, in the face of so much evil and hardship, could any Christian patiently endure? The answer is in...

### **B. God's Presence—the Lord is at hand**

Look at the end of verse 5, the phrase “The Lord is at hand.” really should have a period at the end, not a semicolon. It is the answer to the question we just raised, “How can we patiently endure suffering?”

- i. Immediately we look at this phrase and we think it must refer to Christ's presence with us right now. I think it does emphasize His nearness. But this phrase also often refers to Christ's return. His second coming. In other words, the return of Jesus is imminent. It is soon. And when Jesus comes back, He will set all things right. The

<sup>2</sup> Church History, Volume 1. Everett Ferguson. Pg. 66.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

suffering you have endured, the injustice, the sorrow, the shame, will be turned into glory. But God is not bound by time, so He can be unbelievably patient with mankind—a thousand years is as a day to God, Peter tells us. And so we patiently endure.

- ii. But I think Paul also intends for us to think about God's presence with us right now. There is no reason he could not have meant both things. We tend to think of God's presence in times of blessing. But when we endure difficulties from others, we tend to wonder why God would allow someone to treat us that way. Where are you, God?

*Illustration:* If ever there was someone who would be tempted to think that way, it would be Joseph. Talk about a person who was mistreated by others. Where was God in his trouble?

After his brothers sold him into slavery, this is what we read: ***The Lord was with Joseph, and he became a successful man, and he was in the house of his Egyptian master. His master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord caused all that he did to succeed in his hands.*** Genesis 39:2.

After Potiphar's wife lies about him, this is what we read: ***But the Lord was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison. The keeper of the prison paid no attention to anything that was in Joseph's charge, because the Lord was with him. And whatever he did, the Lord made it succeed.***

God purposefully tells us in valleys of Joseph's life that God was there. Those valleys were actually huge turning points in the perfect process of God's plan. God was with Joseph just as much in the bad times as in the good.

*Application:* We all have suffered from trouble people have caused in our lives. Some cases are far more hurtful and extreme than others. But who is it for you? Have you been tempted to feel as if God has forgotten you? We can so easily react to people like that in our lives, instead of consciously responding. We grow angry instead of choosing patience. We gossip instead of forgiving the other person. But Christ has promised to help you act in a way that is pleasing to God. Why? Because He, too, patiently endured much abuse at the hands of His enemies—and He did it for you. Now He promises to walk with you through your suffering.

*Transition:* Christ can give you endurance. Christ can give you joy. No matter what happens, Christ is more than enough. But when we endure trials, it can be very easy to fall into the snare of anxiety. Nothing will rob you of joy and a patient spirit more easily than fear and anxiety in the face of suffering. But God promises that...

### III. No matter what happens, Christ can give you peace (vv. 6-7). ***do not be anxious about anything,***

#### A. God's Command—Don't be Anxious

Perhaps the first few words of verse 6 seem a little strong. "Do not be anxious about anything?" Really? What God has done here is put anxiety in the category of sin. It is simply wrong for the Christian to be anxious. God is not saying that we should not exercise simple concern, as if we fail to take care of our responsibilities or plan for the future. But He is saying that an inordinate concern about anything in life leads us to sin. Why? There are two reasons anxiety is a sin.

- i. First, anxiety could reflect a failure on our part to trust God.
  - 1. In Matthew 6 and Luke 12 Jesus teaches us that God has created us for a purpose—our life is more important than food or clothes, so God will provide everything we need to fulfill His purpose for our lives. God has numbered our days—can we, by worrying, add one more second to our lives? No.

Furthermore, God is our good Father, and He delights to give us all things in His kingdom.

2. The bottom line in the whole issue is our desire for control. Though we may say God is sovereign, deep down we don't really believe it and so we try to take control. But deep down we also realize we really don't have control. So we try even harder to "get a grip" on the situation. And so we enter a vicious cycle, a downward spiral. We fail to trust God.
- ii. Second, anxiety could reveal pride in our hearts.
1. Notice how 1 Peter 5:6-7 is worded: **Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.** Why would Peter need to remind us to cast our anxieties on God right after he has told us to humble ourselves? Because we may be a little too concerned of what others will think of us! It has been said that "Confession is good for the soul, bad for the reputation." Do we value our reputation so much that we grow anxious at the thought of humbling ourselves? God says that the act of humbling ourselves is actually a way of fighting against anxiety.
  2. This passage has helped me realize just how deeply entrenched fear and anxiety can be in my own heart. And it seems that most of the time we don't need to be convinced that we struggle with anxiety. We already know we struggle with it. Because anxiety is the type of sin that tends to be life-dominating. It shows up all over in our lives. And we will never begin to grow in this area unless we begin to view ourselves as a person dominated by sin, like an alcoholic or a pornography addict—those sins may be shocking or socially reprehensible to us, but anxiety can be just as life-dominating and destructive as any sin we could think of. Why? Because anxiety reveals a heart that refuses to trust God. Anxiety reveals a heart preoccupied with worship of self. Anxiety is a sin.
- iii. And we would have cause to despair if the story stopped there. But it doesn't. For a sin that can be potentially life-dominating, God provides a life-dominating solution. We can do something positive to replace our anxiety. Notice the contrast in verse 6: **do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.**

#### B. God's Solution—Pray

- i. Perhaps the greatest reason why so many of us, myself included, succumb to the sin of anxiety is that our prayer lives are shallow and malnourished.
  1. Here is a common question that we often pass off as not having an answer—how much should I pray? How often do I need to pray? Here the clear answer in the text is, pray about everything! Or, to put it another way, for every concern that tempts you to fear, you ought to have an accompanying prayer. Let me say it again, for every concern that tempts you to fear, there ought to be an accompanying prayer.
  2. And you say, "What?! If I prayed about every single fear I face, I would just be praying, like, all the time!" Exactly. Exactly. Have the words of Joseph Scriven become too familiar to us?

What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear!

What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer!

O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear,  
All because we do not carry everything to God in prayer!

- ii. The believers in the church at Philippi had many cares to be concerned about. They, like us, had troubles to consider both within and outside of the church. And here God calls them, through Paul, to this same kind of prayer-filled life. Notice the content of these prayers
  1. The first word, “prayer,” is exactly what it looks like, a common word for coming before and talking to God, but the next word, “supplication,” often carries with it the idea of need. It leads us logically into the final statement, “let your requests be made known to God,” which is literally a laying out of our specific requests. Our prayers to God are not general, broad-brushed strokes filled with typical phrases that mean almost nothing, no. God wants us to get specific. God wants us to lay out our requests in detail.

*Illustration:* King Hezekiah knew how to pray in this way. When Sennacherib king of Assyria threatened the city of Jerusalem through a blasphemous letter how did Hezekiah respond?

**Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers and read it; and Hezekiah went up to the house of the Lord and spread it before the Lord. 2 Kings 2:14-19**

Hezekiah literally spreads out the letter of his enemy before God. Look God! Here are the words of my enemy. Hezekiah prayed specifically and intentionally. And, if you read on in the story, you would find that God gave very specific answers to Hezekiah’s prayer.

2. God not only wants us to be specific in our prayers, He also wants us to be thankful in our prayers. So often we can become preoccupied with the request making, but God says “with thanksgiving” as an indication that all of our requests ought to be permeated with thanks. And think of the effect that thanksgiving has on our prayers. What can we be thankful for?
  - a. We can be thankful for times when God has already answered our prayers. And that kind of thanksgiving builds our faith as we specifically recall God’s faithfulness.
  - b. We can be thankful for our present situation. Often when we start thanking God for the way things are now, it puts our prayer requests in perspective! We need to be reminded of God’s good care for us right now. So many of our fears and anxieties focus on things that will never happen.

*Illustration:* Charles Spurgeon hits the nail on the head. Listen to what he said: “Many of God’s people are constantly under apprehensions of calamities which will never occur to them, and they suffer far more in merely dreading them than they would have to endure if they actually came upon them. In their imagination, there are rivers in their way, and they are anxious to know how they shall wade through them, or swim across them. There are no such rivers in existence, but they are agitated and distressed about them. An old proverb says, “Don’t cross the bridge till you come to it;” but these timid people are continually crossing bridges that only exist in their foolish fancies. They stab themselves with imaginary daggers, they starve themselves in imaginary famines, and even bury themselves in imaginary graves. We are such strange creatures that we probably suffer more under blows which never fall upon us than we do under those which do actually come. The rod of God does not strike us as sharply as the rod of our own imagination does; our groundless fears are our chief tormentors, and when we are able to abolish our self-inflictions, all the worries of the world become light and easy. However, it is a pity that Christians

who have the gift of faith in Christ given to them, should fall into so guilty and at the same time so painful a habit as this of fearing the oppressor who does not come, and who never will come.”<sup>4</sup>

- c. God tells us to pray with thanksgiving for this very reason. It helps us step back into reality, it drives away foolish fears, and it resets our focus on our good heavenly Father who delights to give us good gifts.
- d. But we often have our prayer substitutes, don't we? I am not thinking of any particular person when I say this, because these are common habits of Americans, and I am right there with you in some of these habits, but have you ever grow angry at someone, not because they hurt you or were doing something wrong, but simply because they were trying to take control. And out of insecurity, out of a desire for safety and control, you lash out or you simmer inside. The root problem is fear, anxiety.
- e. Have you ever taken your fear or anxiety to the internet, instead of God? You know what I mean—under the pretense of “researching” so we can be better informed, we spend hours upon hours on the internet feeding our fears. It's not bad to be informed and prepared, but if it feeds your fear, it is wrong for you to look up statistics about how many people have died from eating a marshmallow this year. If you have done that, I'm not singling you out, I just made up an example. But, honestly, do we not go to extremes that would otherwise be funny, but they are not funny because they come from fear and anxiety?
- f. And really, thanksgiving is key at this point; it's what makes the difference between a worry session with God and a prayer session with God. Thanksgiving is more than just an emotion, it is a discipline we cultivate in our prayer and thought life that transforms our thinking, by God's grace.
- g. You see, God is so good, that if we make our lives a matter of continual, thankful prayer, God promises His...

**C. God's Peace—in Christ Jesus:** Verse 4 says: ***7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.***

- i. What is so interesting about this verse is that God's response to our prayers is not, “I will answer your prayers as you requested.” For certain, other passages in Scripture talk about God using our prayers to accomplish His plans, but this is not one of those passages. God is already in control of the circumstances. What is out of control is *my heart*. The original problem as stated in verse 6 is that our hearts are anxious. Whether or not God does what we want is entirely beside the point. What matters is that God gives us His peace to accept by faith whatever circumstances we face.
- ii. And if this peace is something God owns, which He does, He can choose to give it to whomever He chooses. You may feel as if peace is impossible in your soul. You may say, “I can't imagine what that feels like” because you have never experienced it before, at least not for long. And that is exactly Paul's point. He describes this peace as one that “surpasses all understanding.” In other words, this is a kind of peace that is beyond your wildest imaginations. It is just that kind of peace we are longing for. It is a little taste of heaven on earth. How is this possible? Look at the end of the

<sup>4</sup> Charles Spurgeon, *Needless Fears*, June 11, 1874 [Is. 51:12-13].

verse: it's possible only in Christ Jesus. This is a peace the world cannot offer. This is a peace we cannot conjure up. This is a peace only Jesus can give. As John Newton once said, "How unspeakably wonderful to know that all our concerns are held in hands that bled for us."

*Application:* Have you been living in constant dread, fear and anxiety? God promises peace that you cannot comprehend! Is your life consumed with thoughts of how you can control today, or tomorrow, or the next week? Is it weighed down with dread over the reality that, try as you might, you cannot control all things? Turn to God. Cast all your anxieties on Him, because He cares for you. And you will find rest for your souls, for His yoke is easy and His burden is light.

*Application:* The elections in November have exposed our fear and anxiety more than anything else I can think of. If we were to get on social media, or eavesdrop on a political conversation, and as Christians assess our conversation with each other, we would discover that these kinds of truths are rarely mentioned. Perhaps the reason we don't say anything is because "Rejoice in the Lord always" or "Don't be anxious, just pray" sounds trivial! But that is precisely the problem. We have made these truths truth. And they are not. You cannot lower than Rome did when Nero was in charge. This passage was meant for the lowest of the lows.

*Illustration:* In Acts 12 the Apostle Peter has just been imprisoned. James the brother of John has just been beheaded. It was a dark time for the church, much like it was becoming for the Philippians. And as the church members gathered at Mary house to pray earnestly for the deliverance of Peter, guess who knocks on the door? Peter! And when the servant girl Rhoda runs to tell the people, what do they say? Do they say, "Great! Peter is free!" No, they say—"You are out of your mind. Go away so we can keep praying for Peter, can't you see this is important?" And when she keeps insisting, then what do they say? "It is his angel!" They would sooner claim an angel appeared than Peter himself. Meanwhile Peter is sitting outside hoping like crazy no one see's him. How very much like us. Could it be that in our well-intended prayers for peace, we could get so focused on our "prayers" that we fail to recognize peace is knocking at the door? This is a promise from God. Not a mere possibility. Trust God's promise.

- iii. If you look at the promise again, you will notice Paul says that God's peace will "guard" our hearts and minds, He used a term familiar to the Philippian church. It is kind of like our word garrison. Like God sets up a military outpost to guard us from thoughts of anxiety. And the city of Philippi was itself a Roman military outpost. Those Philippian believers knew the presence of Roman soldiers, night and day keeping watch over their city. Can you imagine the comfort this promise brought to them? And it is a promise for our entire being—our hearts and our minds. God's peace will keep your mind from running crazy, and your heart from growing fearful.

*Illustration:* We tend to think of prayer like we think of car gasoline. My car can only run on so much gas. When the fuel gage starts sinking down low, it's time to stop and fill up. And, regardless of your prayer patterns, whether you only pray a few times a month, or a couple times a week, or every day in your daily devotions, we all tend to think—I have filled up my prayer tank! I'm good for the day. But, according to this passage, it simply doesn't work like that. Yes, concentrated times of prayer are essential, because in those times we can be purposeful and intentional about praying systematically for others, and for our government, and for our work, and for the salvation of the lost. But it is in the daily grind of life, when we maintain a prayerful relationship with the Lord in our daily work, that God begins to give us peace.

*Illustration:* In a recent sermon, I heard a better comparison of how prayer works. Prayer is like walking. In high school and college I had several knee surgeries on my right knee; in fact, I was on crutches so much of the time some of my friends started calling me "gimpy." And those of you who have some sort of

joint or foot or leg issue understand that if one leg is bad, the other leg tries to compensate. It takes a little bit more of the wear, the work, the effort. And in our lives, prayer is like the good leg. And my best efforts are like the gimpy leg. Prayer helps—but more than that, prayer is actually the more powerful, more capable, more transforming element of the two. Why? Because we are good at praying? No! Because Jesus is our good God. Constant prayer is a real demonstration of living faith in God.

*Conclusion:* Will we fail again in this area? Yes, of course we will. Will we try and at times be discouraged? Of course we will. But that is why God's peace is only available in Christ Jesus. That is why we can only patiently endure when we set our eyes on Jesus. That is why we can only rejoice in the Lord. **No matter what happens, Christ is more than enough.** We need to repeat these truths to ourselves—no matter what, Christ can give me peace. Do I pray? No matter what, Christ can help me patiently endure. Am I reacting to my circumstances, or responding as God would have? No matter what, Christ can give me joy. Am I reaffirming my faith in God as I go through suffering?

It may seem impossible to us, but for the grace of God. As Jesus said, "With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God." (Mark 10:27)