

God's Peace Phil 4:4-9

INTRO:

I want to welcome you to BCF and we're so glad you've joined us this morning. If you are new to BCF, I want to extend a special welcome. So glad you're here. We trust the Lord will encourage you richly this morning. If you are checking out churches in the area, we hope your experience here makes you want to come back and get plugged in. If you are in the process of checking out Christianity, I am especially glad you are here. The Christian life is all about a relationship with the God who made you and loves you, and that happens by a process, so thank you for engaging in that process.

We continue our study through Paul's little letter to the Philippians, which we've entitled Joy for the Journey. (SL) Today's passage: Philippians chapter 4:4-9 addresses the theme of peace. And all of us realize that Joy and Peace are deeply connected. (SLIDE)

When we lack peace we don't experience joy, and Paul wants us to know the God of the Bible is really into peace. ☺ As a matter of fact, for thousands of years, when God's people greeted one they used the word SHALOM, which means PEACE. Shalom speaks of God's peace, a global, all encompassing welfare that allows us to enjoy every aspect of life. "Shalom" was pictured by a family sitting in the shade under their fig tree next to their fruitful vine, having a good time just hanging out with family and friends. (SLIDE) But sadly for many of us peace is almost a foreign concept. We continue to reel from the terrorist bombing in Boston. We still ache from the remembrance of April 16th, not to mention the ongoing conflicts in Syria, and Afghanistan. Our world is not at peace.

On a personal level, many of us lack peace. Some of us here today are struggling with economic hardships, marital strife, or strained relationships at work or in the community. We all **want** peace but it seems so very elusive.

When the peace we long for seems beyond our reach, does the Bible have any answers that can help us experience peace despite our circumstances? Does the Bible have answers that can make a real difference in our lives? If you are a Jesus follower you understand God wants you to experience His peace, but maybe you've asked: "Just how is that supposed to happen? How can we experience peace with God and peace from God? How should my life reflect the fact that Jesus, the Prince of Peace, lives in me? What are the paths of peace that God has provided for us as His followers?"

Well, that's exactly what Paul addresses in the passage we study this morning. We will analyze four paths to peace and the products of God's peace in our lives. So open your Bible, your e-reader, your smart phone or whatever medium your using today and let's read Philippians 4: 4-9. Phil. 4:4-9. ☺ Paul says, (SLIDE)

4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!

5 Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near.

6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

*8 Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, **dwell** on these things.*

9 The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you. SHALL WE PRAY? (SLIDE)

The four PATHS TO PEACE God gives us here are:

- Peace by Proximity
- Peace by Prayer
- Peace by Positive Thinking
- Peace by Patterning.

PRODUCTS OF PEACE are Clear thinking and Closer Communion with Christ.
(SLIDE) Let's begin considering PEACE by PROXIMITY.
Paul begins these verses reminding us in v. 4-5 *Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I say rejoice! Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near.*

The first Path to Peace we can call PROXIMITY. Here begins by Paul reminding us to Rejoice in the Lord and to be gentle.

As we study the topic of peace today we see one key part to experiencing peace involves us being peace makers. A big key to being a peacemaker requires being **gentle**. This is a significant relationship clue.

I hope you see how practical this is. One fast way to rob yourself of peace is simply by being harsh, to be hard to get along with as you deal with others around you. If you want NO PEACE, then simply make life hard for others and you will have absolutely no peace in your life. Got it?

☺ But since today we're talking about paths to peace, Paul gives us a big tip here. **BE GENTLE.**

When someone speaks harshly with you, a gentle answer can help diffuse tensions. That allows God's peace to enter in.

This can be a struggle for me. You know, when I stand up here to speak to you ... about God and the Bible, one of the necessary steps in my preparation is that I must first allow the Lord to speak to me. It doesn't make much sense for me to tell you what God wants to change in your life, if I don't first allow Him to point out things He wants to change in me. And as I've been wrestling with this today's passage, the Lord has pointed out my harsh speech. I sometimes use inflammatory words which can really turn people off and creates distance in my relationships. I've hurt people badly with my words. This is one place where I'm practicing repentance. I want to be a peacemaker, but that means my speech needs to be gentler.

(SLOWLY) And one big help for me is exactly what Paul mentions here. You see, as I analyzed my own struggles, I realize I respond with harshness when I feel out on my own, unprotected, or unsupported. That's where Paul gives us the **FIRST PATH TO PEACE**. He reminds us "the Lord is near." **The LORD is near... and He's big!**

When we remember that Jesus is with us, when we understand that no matter how badly we feel, no matter how low or how painful, and no matter how big the giants seem, the Lord Jesus is with us. His presence not only calms our nerves and helps us relax; He also gives us confidence and hope. When we remember the Almighty Son of God is over us, we can breathe a sigh of relief. We can lean in on His strength, which brings us peace.

So understanding, or rather, remembering His **proximity is a key path to peace**. How many harsh, foolish, destructive words or deeds have we done because in that moment we simply forgot the Lord is near? But the more we understand Jesus' nearness, and practice the presence of God, then His goodness and strength shows up in our lives. We experience His peace. So the first path to peace is **PROXIMITY TO CHRIST**. (SLI)

The second path to peace is prayer. Listen to what Paul tells us on this second path: in Phil 4:6-7 *Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

Did you get that? Have you heard that fun song DON'T WORRY BE HAPPY? That makes for a cool song, but that's not what Paul is suggesting. He's got a far more practical solution. God tells us, DON'T WORRY, PRAY.

Paul draws a straight line between the call to prayer and the path to peace. When we engage in conversation with God, He changes the world. In response to our prayer, he changes things around us and things within us. The Lord engages when we pray. When we lift our focus to God, we begin to see the big picture rather than fixating on the problems at hand. Somehow looking to the God of the universe makes our problems seem smaller. ☺ When our thoughts focus on Jesus, no matter the magnitude of our struggle, all things pale in the light of His love. When we pray we are engaging with the One who says, "Is anything too difficult for Me?"

The benefit of this path to peace is that we convert our anxiety from being a negative to a positive. Listen to me. Rather than our anxiety being a source of suffering, when we learn this path to peace, our nervousness leads us to more prayer. Are you troubled? Pray? Are you concerned? Cast all your cares upon Him. The burden that is crushing you is not heavy to the Almighty. But you must pray and give Him the problem. No relief just yet? Then pray more. But did you catch Paul's side bar? Do you see it?

Paul says: Pray with thanksgiving: Prayer and supplication with thanksgiving. When your anxiety level rises, God tells you to prayer. That's not a helpful suggestion; that's a command; pray with thanksgiving. Tell the Lord the things you desire and long for and tell Him what you're thankful for at the same time. Listen to His voice and wait.

So are you worried about finances? Pray. Are you concerned about a child who's struggling, or final exams coming up? Pray. Whatever your concern, cast your cares upon Him, because He cares about you. And as you pray with thanksgiving, God will give you His peace.

(SLIDE)**The third path to peace is positive thinking.** Paul continues in v. 8 *Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, **dwell** on these things.*

If you think the power of positive thinking was something invented by Norman Vincent Peale, you're wrong. ☺ This has always been one of God's paths to peace. No matter the situation there are positive things we can focus on, because God's path to peace involves positive thinking. Take a closer look at Paul's list of positive things: things which are good, honorable, right, pure, lovely, of good repute, excellent, worthy of praise... Do you get the drift? And see *whatever*.. God instructs us to focus our minds on whatever good things so that our outlook is infected with His goodness and kindness.

When I was in seminary I had an African friend who grew up in a war torn nation. He had lost many family members to the war, and he had escaped as a refugee; but he was cut off from the people he loved and his homeland was still in shambles. One of the outstanding characteristics of his life was that he always went about singing softly to himself. I once asked him why he sang and he told me he sang to the Lord to keep his thoughts on His beauty. He practiced positive thinking by praising God in song.

Now, he could have allowed his life to be swallowed up in sorrow, or bitterness against those who had destroyed his town and murdered his family. But he made the tough decision to fix his mind on good and beautiful things. He fought to keep the kindness of God in the front of his mind. We must do the same.

When you fixate on things that are sorry, negative, ugly, filthy, or unholy, you rob yourself of God's peace. So God orders you to break the negative thought habit, and replace it with positive thinking. Perhaps you find it easier to think on all that negative stuff; but that's because you've been practicing negative thinking for a long time. ☺ The Lord tells us the path to peace involves positive thinking, considering the good in people and the many blessings we can thank Him for. This means we must **determine** to take our thoughts captive and fill them with God's truth and light and love.

Let me tell you, as you practice positive thinking you will not only be more encouraged but you will be more encouraging to others. ☺ Would you like that? Would your friends or your kids like that? Your confidence in the Lord will grow and you will increasingly have a peaceful countenance. You will be thankful rather than bitter. Positive thinking is the third path to peace. (SLIDE)

God's fourth path to peace is Peace by Patterning. Peace by patterning. In Phil 4:9 Paul tells us, "*The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.*"

All of us need good models to follow, and Paul unashamedly told the folk of Philippi to follow His model. Let his life be their pattern. He had taught them about Jesus. He had instructed them in the way of faith, and he demonstrated how to interact with others so that people could see Christ in him.

So he instructs us to pattern our lives after his example. Paul doesn't mince words. Here he is, writing from a Roman prison cell and teaching us how to live in God's peace. He tells us to use His life as a pattern for our daily living. This is the fourth path to peace. We must pattern our lives after Paul, and others who follow in his steps. That's why we must meditate on Scripture and hang out with others who do the same.

So let me ask you: whom are you patterning your life after? Who have you picked to be the model you want to imitate in your spiritual life? One of the things BCF really prioritizes is our commitment to being and making disciples of Christ. We want everyone to be in a mentoring relationship. As a matter of fact the ladies are doing a mentoring class for four weeks starting on May 12. Ladies check that out! And that's why we insist you join a house group or a small group Bible study.

Notice that Paul doesn't merely tell us to follow Christ, although that is his ultimate desire. But he knows that for those of us who haven't known Jesus during His earthly lifetime, we may need a human model to pattern after. So he offers himself. He declares that the path to peace is to pattern our life after his.

If you want a life filled with peace, you need to do likewise. You need to get involved in relationships where you can learn by imitation. The fourth path to peace is patterning because much of the Christian life is caught, not taught. We need models to imitate, and that takes getting close enough to understand how a person thinks so as to be changed by their influence.

You may know that my wife Julie's mom passed away last week. And we want to thank you for your prayers for her and some very kind, thoughtful notes. One of the many notes that really touched Julie was a comment from a friend who knows both Julie and

her mom. The friend commented how Julie's mom was always so kind, so hospitable and gentle; never a complainer, always a warm smile ready to serve in any way. I say that to say, if you know Julie, you realize that she is exactly the same. In an amazing way, she has patterned her life after her mom, so that those qualities of warmth, gentleness, kindness and service just flow from her. Julie reflects those qualities in a rich and beautiful way because she has patterned her life after her mom.

Can I tell you a story? The last day Julie's mom, Sally, was on the planet, Julie was sitting with her, holding her hand. Sally was in considerable pain, but not a complaint. She was sort of in a fog, then out of the fog Sally looked into Julie's face, and smiled and said, "You got a new hair cut. I like it! ☺" then she slipped back into the fog. Those were her last words to Julie. How precious, and how typical. ☺ She had lived as a woman of grace, and by God's grace, she died a grace-filled woman. Isn't that beautiful?

Sadly, some of us haven't experienced such ideal patterns at home so we need to get busy and find some patterns to follow. Will you do that? Patterning will be for you a path of peace. (SLIDE)

So we've seen FOUR PATHS TO PEACE : Peace by Proximity, 2. Peace by Prayer, 3. Peace by Positive Thinking, and 4. Peace by Patterning.

Now the good news of Philippians 4:4-9 doesn't end there. Paul tells us two PRODUCTS OF PEACE, which are: Clear thinking and Closer communion with Christ. (SLIDE) So you may ask: what happens when we follow God's paths to peace? First God promises peace will guard our hearts and our minds. Notice again verse 7 when we pray the "*Peace that surpasses all comprehension will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*"

The first product of God's peace is clear thinking. God's peace is not a fluffy ride on a silver cloud. It is a solid rock on which to stand in a raging river. You see, God's peace is not human peace, not peace that comes from improved situations. God's peace flows from Him as a supernatural, enviable, profound, unexplainable comfort and strength that can only be described as divine. God's peace is peace that just can't be explained by normal means. It surpasses comprehension. We need His peace.

Supernatural peace actively guards our thinking and our feelings. This is what he means by guarding our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. (SLIDE)

That word GUARD in Greek speaks of putting a military command around to protect and keep something secure. Its' like having a Roman legion around your head to keep the enemies at bay! ☺

When we examine the impact of our fears or anger: how often have we made poor, regrettable decisions, all because we operated from fear or anger? But God's peace gives us freedom to respond with clarity of thought and a calmness of emotion that demonstrates that God is alive and well. Jesus says, "*My peace I leave you. My peace I give you. Not as the world gives, I give it to you.*"////// **SLIDE** **Secondly God's peace enables us to enjoy closer communion with Him.** Listen again to how Paul concludes verse 9: *and the God of peace will be with you. the God of peace will be with you.*"

(SLIDE) You see, God's nearness is not only one of the paths to peace but is also the product of His peace. Our experience of the peace of God, leads us to closer communion with the GOD OF PEACE.

O child of God, the Lord wrote this letter to you because He wants you to experience His supernatural peace. He desires your life to demonstrate the fact that He is

mighty and good and near to His beloved children. He wants others to look at you and sense the God of peace is near you.

Do you wonder if such a supernatural peace can really be a part of our daily lives? Honestly, isn't that just too good to be true? Well, it would be too good to be true if it weren't for one historical event that has changed, not only the course of history, but has changed a great many of our lives as well. (SLIDE)

The prophet Isaiah foretold that **great event** some 650 years before it happened. He said, "*For to us a child will be born, a son will be given; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace.*" Do you know who Isaiah was talking about? ☺

Yes, His name is Jesus. And in order for us to experience the supernatural peace He offers, we need to know how He became the Prince of peace. Jesus became the Prince of Peace at the cross of Calvary.

You see, each of us has ignored God, and gone our own way looking for meaning in life, and trying to find happiness without Him. But in so doing we have broken God's laws in countless ways, and thus we have become guilty and estranged from Him. We became God's enemies, even without knowing it. We are worthy of God's anger and punishment, but rather than penalizing our rebellion or forever leaving us at odds with Him, Jesus came to earth to pay the debt of our crime, to suffer the condemnation we deserved and to die and experience hell in our place.

On the cross God took His wrath and placed it upon His Son. Jesus became the Prince of Peace by purchasing peace with God, bearing our condemnation and death. By His death we are offered life. By Jesus' becoming God's enemy and bearing God's wrath He offers to us the privilege to be reconciled with God, to become His friends, yes, even His children. He invites us into a peace filled relationship that becomes a supernatural fountain of peace to all who will trust wholly in Him.

You see, the peace Jesus offers comes from Him alone. It doesn't come by a better marriage. It doesn't come by getting a job. God's peace doesn't come by healing our diseases. His peace comes by drawing near to Him, by accepting His gift of eternal life, then enjoying Him, and by knowing whatever befalls us in this life, He is with us and will give us the love and strength we need to shine with His life until we see Him face to face. (SLIDE)

So we've seen **FOUR PATHS TO PEACE:**

Peace by Proximity

Peace by Prayer

Peace by Positive Thinking

Peace by Patterning.

And **TWO PRODUCTS OF PEACE:**

Clear thinking/ Closer communion with Christ: **ALL BECAUSE JESUS BECAME THE PATH TO PEACE...** Shall we pray?

Christ is the path. Christ is the prize. Christ is the peace.
Jesus is the God of peace, the Prince of Peace, the true Peacemaker between both God and men and men and men.

II. B. PRODUCTS OF PEACE (details)

The products of peace are manifold. Let me share some of them..

First, the Almighty is magnified, because we rest in His dominion and care. When a man or woman demonstrates a peaceful soul in the midst of trials, suffering and hardship, that brings glory to God. The countenance of a person at peace is both beautiful as it is powerful. It demonstrates the reality of God and His power at work in frail and fickle human flesh.

The second product of peace is that it makes us more like our Beloved Jesus. When we call Him the Prince of Peace we are not only declaring that He is the fountain head of peace for all mankind. We are also saying that He is the Man of Peace. As I contemplate Jesus' way of suffering as He carried His cross up the Golgotha Hill, when women weeping for Him drew near to share their distress over His lot, He looked into their eyes and told them with such kindness, "Daughters of Jerusalem, Do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and your children." And you recall as Jesus was hanging nailed to the cross, when one of the thieves begged that Jesus have mercy on Him, Jesus turned to him and replied, "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in paradise."

Dear ones, if you love Jesus, one of your life goals is to become more like the Lord Jesus. For His sake and for yours, you desire to reflect the same qualities of grace, joy and peace that Jesus overflowed with during his sojourn with us. And so you are naturally, or should I say, supernaturally desirous to have peace like a river flowing from your soul. You want the products of peace in your life.

So my invitation to you is to seek peace and pursue it. You will determine that Jesus Himself is our peace, is your peace and you will wonder and ponder and pray for His peace to fill you as Christ fills you. The wonder of seeking peace, like so many things, it comes most directly by indirect methods ☺. When we seek Christ, when we grow closer to Him, more delighted in His love, more aware of His presence, more confident in His plan, more dedicated to His will, more aligned with His purposes, then peace flows in our souls. That's why Paul can say with great confidence, "the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace."

Now, let me interject here for a moment a comment if you are personally struggling with this whole area of peace in your soul. Paul also commented in Romans 5:1 "*Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*" If you are aware of a lack of peace in your life, before you can take

advantage of the paths of peace that the Lord has provided, you must first be made right with God. That's why Jesus came in the first place, to make a way so that you might be reconciled with God and then the channel of His peace and power is opened for you. So if you have not given your life to Him, if you have not been justified by faith, then that is an a priori step. You simply must recognize that you have not met God's holy standards in the way you live or think. You in a word are a sinner in need of a Savior. Secondly, you must realize that Jesus is God incarnate, the eternal Son who came to earth, became man, so that He might die in your place and take the punishment that our sin rightly deserves. Thirdly, you must Repent of your selfish way of life and turn around and decide to follow Christ, and lastly you simply receive by faith this gift of God's righteousness purchased for us by Jesus' death in our place on the cross of Calvary.

And in so doing, God does something that will change your eternity. He counts you totally just. He declares you holy and thus opens the door for a profound, intimate relationship with Him that comes when you are justified by faith. You at that time are reconciled to God and you have peace with Him. In that new state, you have access to all the wonderful rights and privileges of any member of His family. Then the paths of peace powerfully work in your soul.