

### **The Way to Peace of Mind and Contentment (Phil. 4:9-11)**

Before we pray and come to our time in God's Word I want to invite you to a special prayer, praise and testimony time with God's people. Tonight's service will be led by the young adults and the focus will be young and old, God's faithfulness to all generations. Up-front you'll see some who are 19, someone over age 90 praying, you'll hear the hearts of both young and old. Music will be led by teens and twenty-somethings, and eighty-somethings will share testimonies and prayers for the youth. And the young will do the same for the older generation – and the rest of us in-between. The 18+ year old youth and those 80+ years young and a few others will lead. Both ends of the spectrum are so important and I trust this will be an encouraging time

**SLIDE.** My wife and I have had the privilege of supporting the YAG led by the Greggs (YAG=Young Adult Group, post-HS teens and twenties). They meet every other Friday for study and fellowship for hours and other times just to have fun and enjoy life together. From that there's developing deeper relationships and discipleship. They'll be serving in song, scripture reading, prayer, and testimony along with another important ministry, our praying ladies, our elder sisters in Christ will join in the same. This is an important time in the life of our church. One teen said after Dean died that with these good guys dying it motivated him to be one of the good guys. That greatest generation I pray will be encouraged by the next generation rising up, and I encourage all of you, every age or stage, be here tonight at 6:00. **Let's pray**

Well let's continue our worship by the hearing of God's holy Word in Phil 4. This is worship, too. As I read Phil 4, let's focus our hearts on our great and gracious God. The next text in our verse-by-verse preaching is v. 9-11, but I'll read the context starting in v. 4. Those who have ears let them hear.

*Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! <sup>5</sup> Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near. <sup>6</sup> Be anxious for nothing, 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 comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. <sup>8</sup> 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. [Now our text:] <sup>9</sup> 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.*

*<sup>10</sup> But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned before, but you lacked opportunity. <sup>11</sup> Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am.*

We have a number in our midst who have been through hard circumstances this month. Yesterday our church had its 3<sup>rd</sup> memorial service in 4 weeks, 3 honorable and noble men of good repute, with excellent and praiseworthy character for us to dwell on. For their wives now without them, learning to be content in loss and loneliness is a process long after the memorial and it can come in waves of painfulness, anxiousness, thoughts other than v. 8. As family in Christ we're to patiently graciously live out v. 10 to help them live out v. 11. v. 10 in other translations: *'your care...has flourished'* and *'you have been concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it'* (NKJV, NIV). v. 14 says it's good for us to share in other's affliction, trouble, or distress.

Paul wrote this from prison, on the verge of death, as he wrote in chapter 1, but he says in v. 10 he rejoiced greatly in the Lord at the church's concern and concern they showed him, and how they gave to provide for his needs. I rejoice in the Lord that I've seen this month revive our concern for one another, and I've felt it and seen it. It's not that you weren't a concerned or caring church before, but the opportunity of this month is helping it flourish and we need to keep growing and showing and sharing each other's burdens

I've been living this passage. And that's what we're supposed to do with it, to dwell on these things, to live in them. These are life verses of many and many of you have some of these verses memorized. I would encourage all of you to memorize v. 4-9 or through v. 13, doing all things through Christ who strengthens you. This is God's living Word. I've seen living examples:

- Like v. 4 I've seen rejoicing by Laura, Bonnie, Terry, their families
- Like v. 6-7 I've seen peace in waves of sorrow like sea billow rolls
- Like v. 8, one widow shared the battle of the mind is continual daily
- In v. 9 I think of Dean, what we learned from him we're to practice
- In v. 11 I think of Frank who learned to be content in his wheelchair
- Like v. 5 a gentle spirit known to all was what was known by Alvin in his hospital stays this year. Some translate 'sweet reasonableness' or 'courteous/gentleness/graciousness.' Lorna said at the memorial: 'Late in life despite the extensive and invasive...medical care that he needed, Alvin maintained his courteous and gracious manner. Hospital staff often commented on how sweet and gentle he was.'

<sup>9</sup> *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.* That's a power of example. We learn from those we have heard and seen in person, putting into practice the things of v. 8 that they lived, keep memorializing their faith

So when the end of v. 9 says '*...practice these things...*' we need to ask 'what are *these things* we need to practice so the God of peace is with us?' These things Paul has been writing, and I want to focus especially on these things we just read. Paul tells us in the first part of v. 9, these things they've been learning and receiving and hearing and seeing from him need to be put in practice. The church in Philippi learned things from Paul in person years earlier, but these things in v. 9 include what he's writing in this letter that is being read to them, they heard and saw Paul practicing what Phil 4 preaches

- '*rejoice in the Lord*' -> he's been doing that through this whole letter
- '*be anxious for nothing*' -> chapter 1 models that with his life on line
- '*prayer and supplication with thanksgiving*' – he practices that in 1:3f
- v. 8 what to dwell on, Paul models with those hurting him in chapter 1
- v. 8 ends with think about *these things*, then v. 9 *practice these things*

**v. 9-11 Outline - Practice these things for:**

- 1. Peace when in disharmony**
- 2. Peace when in anxiety**
- 3. Contentment in adversity**

**1<sup>st</sup>: practice these things in v. 9 for peace when in disharmony/conflict**

<sup>2</sup> *I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord.*

There was disharmony, disagreement. The way to peace starts in the mind. Paul wrote of unbelievers in Rom 3 '*the way of peace they have not known*' (v. 17 ESV). But of believers in Jesus he wrote there is '*peace for everyone who does good,*' and '*the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace*' (2:10, 8:6). Rom 12 adds '*be transformed by the renewing of your mind,*' then the same truths as Phil 4 (rejoice, pray, think rightly, etc.) and says '*If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men*' (or 'live peaceably with all,' active effort, peace in disharmony/conflict). Rom 12 ends '*if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink...do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*' Rom 14 goes on: '*pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another. Do not tear down the work of God* [he talks there about even in what we or drink we're not to] *...do anything by which your brother stumbles*' (v. 19-21). Rom 15 ends in same words as Phil 4:9 '*the God of peace be with you...*'

The God of peace is with you as you do good to those who you feel have done you evil, as you practice renewing your mind to dwell on what's good that you can do in return to that person. The mind set on the Spirit is peace as you set your mind on whatever is honorable that you can do in response to what you felt was dishonorable toward you. You meditate on whatever is excellent, and Paul told the Corinthians the more excellent way is love, so think: 'how can I show love to \_\_\_\_ who I'm not feeling love for or from?' 2 Cor 13:11 *'rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.'*

Same pattern as Phil 4, agree in the Lord as you rejoice in the Lord, restore where possible, live in peace, and the God of love and peace will be with you as you obey Him (like end of Phil 4:5 says He is near, at hand to help). The way to peace of mind is the way of love, you have to think God's love. v. 8 says I need to think on what's *true*, and it may not be true that the other person is really your enemy. But even if it is true, love your enemy, pray for him or her, do good practically to meet needs, and try to overcome them by good. The context of Phil 4 is a prison letter to a church in Philippi. Back in chapter 1 Paul mentions opponents saying bad things about him that weren't true and other Christians treated him dishonorably, but he writes urging the church to dwell only on what's *true and honorable*. Paul hadn't been treated right but he refused to stay there in his thinking or let others. Maybe friends said 'Paul, you can't move on from that, what they did to you wasn't right!'

Paul might reply, 'I have to move on, it wouldn't be right for me to focus on what isn't right, I need to forget what's behind and focus on what's right in Christ as I strive forward upward' (chap. 3). He'd been attacked personally by men of impure motives, he said in chapter 1, but he chose to set his mind on what was *pure*, and calls us to join him in Phil 4:8. In v. 2-3 Paul talks about a conflict with 2 women that wasn't pretty, but he calls them and us in v. 8 to think about whatever's *lovely...commendable* (also in each other).

It's not hard to imagine Synteche replaying in her mind what Euodia did or said, imagining her motives, and what she didn't say but Synteche thought Euodia must have thought. v. 8 says '*whatever is true*' is where you have to start and stop whatever isn't true. It's not whatever is our feeling. Paul calls for biblical counselors or a 3<sup>rd</sup> party to help ask 'what's the truth here, is that what she actually said? Synteche, are you thinking by your emotions or truth? Are you distorting truth on this? If you set your mind anywhere else but truth you'll bear a grudge or judge your sister's motives dishonorable.'

‘Don’t go there Synteché. Don’t fixate on what you think isn’t right, that’s disobeying God’s command to only focus on *whatever is right*. You have to think fairly and rightly about your sister, with *pure* thoughts, not evil ones. If you can’t stop thinking about her, start thinking about what’s *lovely* about her, how God loves her *and you in sin*, and a way you can show love to her’

When you’re tempted to think about someone you disagree with, it’s easy to fixate on what you condemn about what he did, but v. 8 says fix your mind on what you can commend about him. NIV ‘*whatever is admirable*,’ others have ‘*good repute/report*,’ unless it’s good, it isn’t good for us to dwell on. NKJV ‘*if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy, meditate on these things*.’ I can think of a lot of things that aren’t excellent or worthy of praise, but I’m only to meditate on these things that I can give thanks to God for in v. 6, which then gives the peace of God in v. 7 to guard my heart and mind. This is a grid to filter out debris flowing through into our minds. Like a screen capturing harmful substances, take hurtful thoughts captive.

Ken Sande, *The PeaceMaker*: ‘If you respond to conflict like most people, you will tend to focus on the negative characteristics of the person who is disagreeing with you, exaggerating his faults and overlooking his virtues. The more distorted your perspective becomes, the more likely you are to imagine the worst about the other person, which may lead you to misjudge his or her values, motives, and actions. A negative perspective can also lead to bitterness, which is characterized by dwelling on the hurt and thinking how little you deserve it. The best way to overcome this tendency is to think deliberately about aspects of others that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, praiseworthy...[v. 8] is teaching us to counterbalance our natural tendency to focus *only* on what is bad in those who oppose us.

This change in perspective does not come naturally for most of us. It requires a deliberate decision, followed by perseverance... Proverbs 11:27: “*He who seeks good finds goodwill, but evil comes to him who searches for it.*” If you look for something bad in another person, you will usually be able to find it. On the other hand, if you look for what is good, you are likely to find that too—and then more and more that is good. As you regain a more balanced view of the other person, you will often find it easier to overlook minor offenses... Many marriages, friendships, and business relationships are lost because people focus exclusively on a point of disagreement and forget about all that they have enjoyed in and with one another. Remembering the good may provide the motivation it takes to work through the painful differences that temporarily separate people.

Second...as you focus on what is good about another person and openly acknowledge those qualities, he or she may begin to do the same in return. As you gain a more accurate assessment of each other and as goodwill grows between you, you will both have a greater freedom to deal honestly and realistically with your differences. This will increase your ability to set aside imagined problems and offenses and give proper attention to areas of genuine disagreement. When both of you bring your attention and energy to bear on fewer, more clearly defined issues, you are more likely to find workable solutions...Paul's final instruction to Euodia and Syntyche (and to us) is both straightforward and encouraging [v. 9 says practice these things for peace]...He had taught and demonstrated how to deal with disputes, but he understood our human tendency to be hearers rather than doers of the Word ... When you use God's principles to check your attitude and make needed changes, you will be surprised how often you can overlook offenses and experience the...[v. 9] promise: "*The God of peace will be with you.*"<sup>1</sup>

And how good it is when the family of God is together in peace and unity

And remember before peace in v. 7 there's prayer with thankfulness in v. 6. Chapter 2 shows when we grumble, the problem is we're not humble. In 2:2 he mentions unity and v. 3 says we need humility of mind to think of others as more important than what we think (context includes disunity). 2:5 calls us to have the mind in Christ who humbled himself and emptied himself as a slave for sinners. All that before 2:14: '*do everything without complaining or arguing*' (NIV). It starts in the mind, having the mind of Christ who was obedient to the point of death on a cross and is now highly exalted. We need to take sinful thoughts captive and make them obedient to Christ. Christ was put to death for sinful thoughts, words, deeds and desires; Col 3 commands '*Put to death...evil desire...anger...malice, slander...*' (v. 5, 8 ESV). Words that tear down and the thoughts behind them must bow down at the foot of the cross where Christ paid for sin so you don't need to make others pay for sin against you. Christ-exalting thoughts lead to words that build up. There needs to be humbling to replace grumbling because we speak what we think

Phil 4:9 says '*practice these things,*' which includes all that and especially v. 8 right before it, the thoughts we dwell on. What if others share thoughts with you that violate v. 8? This is where we can learn from what we've seen in others, as v. 9 says. Alvin's tribute at his memorial was that he 'was good at putting the best construction on everything...turn[ing] a conversation that was a bit judgmental with "Well..." and adding a gently positive comment that would reframe the tone of the conversation. He was generous in his thoughts about people...humble...willing to seek help and to accept advice'

## Secondly in context we practice these things for peace when in anxiety

The peace of v. 9 is also in the context of anxiety in v. 6. Not interpersonal peace only because of conflicts with others, we also need internal peace for conflicts within ourselves. Our thoughts can be hurried, worried or stressed. Some have family relational dread, others physical health concern, others financial uncertainty panics, others have friend-related burdens, for others it's fears of the unknown that have been dominating your hearts and minds.

Timothy Witmer, *Mindscape: What to Think About Instead of Worrying*:

‘Having worked closely with people for over 40 years as a pastor, I have become convinced of the importance of addressing the ways in which we think about the challenges of life. If you would allow us to take a look at the features that define the landscape of your mind—your “mindscape”...—what would we see?...[Is it] still cluttered with the same old scenery... Would you characterize the vistas of your thought life as filled with...fear?... “worry weeds” popping up in our mindscape...weeds are stubborn. If something isn’t done they can overtake our whole mindscape and impact all that we do ...[he says worry weeds grow so high they shade out the sun’s] light of the truth of God’s love for us. Today’s anxiety immobilizes us as our thoughts get tangled in what might happen tomorrow...[he says thankful prayer in v. 6] is a weed killer...[to] fight off the worry weeds before they overrun...’<sup>2</sup>

v. 7 says God’s peace surpasses what we can comprehend with our mind, or transcends what our mind can understand, and it adds it *‘guards your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.’* But Paul doesn’t stop there or leave it there—he anticipates our thought life may still revert back to anxious thoughts in v. 6. What do we do then? How do you keep guard on your heart and mind? If God’s peace is a weed guard, or weed protector, what do we do for those noxious tenacious worry weeds that break through and keep popping up? v. 8 recognizes even with prayer covering, worries or fears rise I must uproot.

Day by day and with each passing moment Strength I find to meet my trials here:

Trusting in my Father’s wise bestowment I’ve no cause for worry or for fear

If a worrisome thought comes that isn’t true, you stop it like an intruder into a home, disturbing the peace, you don’t let him in to make himself at home. If anxious thoughts that are dishonorable to God come to the door, shut the door, those can’t dwell in the dwelling of your mind. Ask what honors God and whatever doesn’t, this guard or grid must keep those thoughts out. Phil 4:8 ends with what’s admirable or praiseworthy (like v. 6, what to thank the Lord for). Our anxiousness needs to be replaced with thankfulness in mind. It’s not enough to put off worry, I have to put on worthy-of-praise thoughts.

Our heart and mind need to be guarded, because our thinking and identity are linked. Chuck Swindoll said what defines us is 10% what happens to us but 90% how we think in response to what happens. The same is true of thoughts that come into our mind, there may be a small percent we feel like we can't control, they just happen, but the majority of our struggle has to do with how we think about what we think, how we respond to those thoughts or what we do with those thoughts, what we meditate on, dwell, and ponder.

Luther: *I can't stop birds flying overhead but I stop them nesting in my hair!*

I won't spend as much time on anxiety because I preached a whole sermon on that in v. 6-7 in how we speak to God, but for v. 8, how we speak to self in our mind, let me read from *Mindscape* (a chapter on each phrase in v. 8):

*whatever is true...honorable / noble* – God-honoring truth, like God is 'bigger than all our problems, worries, and fears...God is sovereign ...He reigns everywhere...all the time...over everything...[He] controls all for our good and his glory. There is peace in remembering the truth that we are not sovereign [in control] but live and work under Someone else's rule'

*whatever is right... pure* – 'Meditate on what you know to be right... Do what you know is right...you will have a clear (peaceful) conscience... Meditate on "whatever is pure." It is just not enough to do a "search-and-destroy" mission against impurity...you must also positively ponder what... is pure...purity in all of life begins in the thought life:...*whatever is pure.*'

*whatever is lovely...of good repute / commendable / admirable* –

'The power of admiration is that it fuels our aspirations of who we want to be and what we want to do. Admiring others turns our minds from ourselves (always a good thing and often a source of our worries!) and gives us goals ...*you aspire to what you admire*...express your admiration...admire the One who is the source of any admirable qualities we have...(Matthew 5:16)...

Whenever you're overcome with worries, with concern about all the things that could go wrong, ask for the Spirit to fill your mind with what is lovely instead. Then, by faith, turn your mind to the loveliness of Christ...[Ps 27:4]

*if there is any excellence / virtue and if anything worthy of praise* –

2 Peter 1:3-4 says God gives '*everything we need for life and godliness*... we worry about our inadequacy and wonder how we can make a change in our lives or make it through the challenges we are facing...he has promised *everything* you need for life and godliness. *Remember the excellence* that God is determined to produce in you [Peter says God '*called you to his own...excellence*']...*Remember...precious and very great/magnificent promises*... *Keep the past in the past*. Peter also reminds us where we came from, "having escaped the corruption..." ...don't look back...Why would you want to go back to those things that rot the soul and clutter your mindscape?<sup>13</sup>



Isa 43:18 *'Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past'* (NIV). That's the sense of forgetting the things that are behind in Phil 3, don't dwell there. Phil 4:8 says do dwell here in these things in v. 8. v. 9 says if we practice these things (not just v. 8, praying in v. 6, etc.) God's peace will be with us.

God's perfect peace [is] over all victorious in its bright increase...

Not a surge of worry, not a shade of care, not a blast of hurry, touch the Spirit there  
Stayed upon Jehovah, hearts are fully blest, finding as He promised perfect peace and rest<sup>4</sup>

### **I'll just introduce #3: practice these things for contentment in adversity**

Our time is gone so v. 11-13 we'll continue next time but it's good we spent the time we did first on peace of mind to build a foundation for contentment (part 2 next week). Contentment deserves a whole other sermon (or series?). Paul says in v. 11 he learned to be content whatever his circumstances. Paul could say that in adverse circumstances in prison. He wrote these words by a hand chained to a Roman soldier, his mind at peace and his heart content. Peace has the ideas of harmony, serenity, tranquility, but contentment goes deeper to sufficiency. Peace is fear or worry neutralized, contentment takes it a step further to being satisfied. Contentment includes rejoicing in v. 10. What's the secret to being content he talks about in v. 12? Come back next week to learn more about learning to be content and what the secret to it is.

But as we close, I have to ask if the God of peace is with you? There is no peace for the wicked. Some of you don't have the peace *of* God because you don't have peace *with* God. You need what Paul calls '*the gospel of peace.*' You need '*grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*' (Phil 1:2). Jesus is the Prince of Peace for all who come to Him for grace and mercy, turning from their sins to trust Him alone and what He did on the cross for our sins. If you never have, come in humble repentant faith to Jesus as Savior and Lord. Like a servant would bow before royalty, bow before the Prince of Peace as your ruler. He'll give grace to you and peace that passes understanding. And for us who possess these, let's press on from salvation in Christ to satisfaction in Christ, being content in His sufficiency. Let's practice these things, dwell on these things, to guard hearts and minds.

Closing benediction then we'll pray and sing a benediction: *The LORD bless you, and keep you; The LORD make His face shine on you, And be gracious to you; The LORD lift up His countenance on you, And give you peace.*

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<sup>1</sup> Ken Sande, *The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict*, Third Edition. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2004), 87–90.

<sup>2</sup> Timothy Z. Witmer, *Mindscape: What to Think About Instead of Worrying*, 1<sup>st</sup> 2 chapters.

<sup>3</sup> Witmer, chapters 3-9.

<sup>4</sup> Frances Havergal, “Like a River Glorious.”