

Philippians 4:4-9

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[0 : 00] All right, please take your copy of God's Word and turn with me to Philippians chapter 4.! It just reminded me, and I just thought it would be worth mentioning this morning as we find ourselves in a kind of a troubled age as it concerns Christianity, that today is the anniversary of the Diet of Worms, where Luther stood trial and was required to recant all of the writing that he had done, which included the 95 Theses, but also much more that he had written about biblical Christianity and the kind of the offense to that that Rome was perpetrating.

And he famously said, My conscience is held captive to the Word of God. Here I stand. I could do no other. But you may not realize, I mean, we certainly live in a day where boldness is necessary, and sometimes people want to point to Luther as an example of brashness.

And I don't think Luther was that at all. In fact, before he made that statement, My conscience is held captive to the Word of God. Here I stand. I can do no other.

He asked, May I please have some more time to consider? And that gets left out of history altogether. He was a humble man, and I think even timid in some respect, but when pressed to the point, right, he said, Oh, no, we must listen to God's Word.

So let that encourage us as we open God's Word together this morning. You know, it is altogether possible to understand the gospel for the salvation of your soul, which is its primary purpose, right?

[2 : 03] That you would be saved from the judgment to come, but to miss the point that the gospel has implications for the way that you think and feel and act today.

We flee to Christ to be saved from hell, and we flee to Christ to be saved from sin, or at least we should.

Having been saved from sin, we ought to also want to live holy lives. We have much opportunity as a church of the living God to make him known in the world through the careful application of the gospel to the daily struggles of this life.

The gospel speaks to the every day. Of course, doing this, putting God on display in this way, does not preclude gospel proclamation. We must proclaim the good news of Jesus, but it most definitely should accompany it.

Each of us have and will likely experience some measure of anxiety in this life. Anxiety is reportedly on the rise in our society in massive ways.

[3 : 14] You can just imagine the pandemic and what it may have brought out in many people. You yourself may have experienced this or seen this in people that you know and love. Some of us have a greater propensity toward anxiety than others, and I don't want to be insensitive this morning to the fact that there are some anxiety disorders.

There are some people who have a medical propensity towards anxiety, but most of us are experiencing anxiety in ways that are not medical but spiritual.

It's inevitable that fallen people living in a fallen world from time to time will feel the weightiness of this reality that we live in. Some people are abundantly aware that they are anxious, but many are not.

We use a lot of kind of cloaking words for things like anxiety, worry, concern, etc. So I hope two things for our time together this morning just before we read the text.

That you will have a clear understanding of your personal anxiety and be better equipped to fight for your joy. And secondly, that you will have a clear understanding of others' anxiety and be better equipped to fight for their joy.

[4 : 32] We are instructed to love one another, and Paul tells us in Galatians 6-2 that if we love one another, we will bear one another's burdens. We're to take on the trouble of others.

So if you're in a relationship with somebody who deals with anxiety, which if you're unaware of this, you are. You're in a relationship with somebody who deals with anxiety, right? They're going to ask for help, and you ought to be able to give them good biblical answers to their spiritual problems. So our text for today is Philippians 4, verses 4-9. Before I read it, beloved, let me remind you this is God's word to us, written for his glory and our good.

We would all do well to listen to it in order to believe its promises and obey its commands. Verse 4. Rejoice in the Lord always.

Again, I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.

[5 : 39] And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. 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.

What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you. I was once at a biblical counseling conference, and in an afternoon session, the speaker began his lesson by saying, very boldly, he said, tell me what you worry about or what makes you angry, and I will show you your idols.

Well, I found this emphatic statement just too strong to not wrestle out its implications. In fact, I probably would have done well to listen to the rest of what he had to say, but I spent the next hour writing down things that worried me or things that angered me and tracing each thing to its source. I just kept asking, but why? Why does that worry me? Why does that cause me to be angry? And I was shocked to discover that most, if not all, of my worry was sinful anxiety.

Paul tells us in verse 6, do not be anxious about anything. However, in 2 Corinthians 11, verse 28, he writes, after a list of things that he had suffered, he says, The word in Greek is a very flexible word, and that's why Paul can use the word in two different places, and contextually we can understand it differently, and in our English we just get the word anxiety in both places.

[7 : 32] But what we can learn is that it is possible to be faithfully concerned about a matter, not to be flippant, uncaring, but you can be faithfully concerned about a matter.

But the command of Paul in verse 6 to not be anxious about anything is in reference to a faithless concern. And this is an anxiety that must be remedied for our good and for the glory of God.

Wouldn't it be wonderful to set aside faithless concern, faithless anxiety. Now before I give you the outline for the text and we begin our study of it, I want you to see something significant.

Everything Paul is teaching us to do is an expansion of what he has previously declared we are.

Take a look back at chapter 4, verse 1. He says, Therefore, my brothers whom I long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.

What does standing firm look like? In verses 2 and 3, Paul tells us it is working toward and maintaining the unity of the church and other things that follow in our text.

[8 : 44] Right? He's saying, Therefore, live like this. But 4.1 begins with a therefore. Paul is saying, Stand firm because of something.

What is that something? is the reality of who you and I are in Jesus Christ. Right? If we have placed saving faith in Him.

Right? Because of who you are. Notice verse 1. He calls my brothers and he says, Beloved. Right? Signifying words. Titles for people who are found in Christ.

Therefore, stand firm. firm. You can back up a bit more into chapter 3 and see verses 20 and 21. He says, But our citizenship is in heaven and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like His glorious body by the power that enables Him even to subject all things to Himself.

If we are in Christ, we are not living primarily for this life, but primarily for the life to come. We are part of a theocracy being ruled by King Jesus who is bringing all things under His reign.

[10 : 00] Right? Now and forevermore. We have to have this framework in our minds. Right? This text, verses 4-9, is written for Christians. People have placed their faith in Jesus and helps us to understand how to deal with sinful anxiety.

So the outline for the text will be as follows. Number one, fight for your joy. I'll go back to these if you're not familiar with the way I format sermons. Number one, fight for joy. Number two, be

gracious toward others.

Number three, turn to God with all of your concerns. And number four, if you're scribbling these right now, I'm sorry, dehabituate by rehabituating. I won't spell that for you.

Dehabituate by rehabituating. All right, number one. Fight for your joy. Look at this in verse four. Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I will say rejoice.

Lasting joy, true joy, the kind of rejoicing that Paul's talking about here is not circumstantial. It has nothing to do with what's going on around you.

[11:08] It has everything to do with the state of being because of who you are. We may find temporary happiness in our circumstances, right? And that's fine. That's good. I took the boys to a birthday party yesterday.

We had fun. It was an enjoyable time. But we will just as readily find great misery in our circumstances. If you're always looking to circumstances, you will have highs and you will have desperate lows.

Paul here exhorts us to rejoice always. How is this possible? It is possible and it is only possible if we find joy in an unchanging, eternal source of joy, right?

in the Lord. It's the only place this kind of always rejoicing can come from. And beloved, this is a battle of the mind.

Romans chapter 12 and verse 2. Paul says, do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed, changed by the renewal of your mind.

[12:19] This is not a battle that needs to take place at the level of your feelings. You will lose that battle. This is a battle that has to take place in the mind.

In our recent study of the book of Hebrews, we learned at the end of chapter 10 about the bizarre behavior of a suffering church. Not behaving at all like the world, right?

Not conformed to the world, but like transformed people. We read in verse 34 of Hebrews 10. You had compassion on those in prison.

So there were believers who had been imprisoned for their faith. And you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property. I think we could easily say, I think many of us would go, yeah, yeah, compassion on those in prison.

I could do that. But as they did this, they were identifying themselves as Christian, right? They were showing themselves to be in relationship with these people who had been imprisoned for their faith.

[13:24] And as a result, their property was plundered, right? Their homes were ransacked. And the author of Hebrews says the most curious thing.

They did this joyfully. They joyfully accepted the plundering of their property. How? How? How are they rejoicing always, even in a circumstance like that?

Well, he tells us. I know you don't have it open in front of you, but I'll tell you. He goes on in that verse to say, since you knew, in the mind, mindfully, you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one.

One that could not be taken away, right? One not based in circumstance, but in the Lord, an unchanging source of joy.

John Newton, this is on your bulletin, I believe, if I'm tracking my mind right, who was an 18th century Anglican minister. He's famous for writing the hymn Amazing Grace. Use this wonderful analogy.

[14:28] He said, suppose a man was going to New York to take possession of a large estate and his carriage should break down one mile before he got to the city, which obligated him to walk the rest of the way to the inheritance, right?

So here's a man doing well and now suffering, but he's headed somewhere, right? He's headed to receive a great inheritance. Newton goes on to say, what a fool we should think him if we saw him wringing his hands and blubbing all the remaining mile.

My carriage is broken. My carriage is broken. And many of us live this way. We have eternal reward promised to us and we're blubbing and wringing our hands about temporal loss.

C.S. Lewis, in *The Weight of Glory*, wrote, we are half-hearted creatures fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us.

Like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.

[15 : 39] So we have to fight for joy and we have to do so by reorienting our thinking. Secondly, be gracious towards others.

Verse 5. Verse 5 says, let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand. Now, the Greek word translated reasonableness in the English standard version of the Bible that most of us have this morning.

If you don't, don't feel left out. It's okay. But this word is a very rich word. Commentators and translators have varied widely on its rendering.

You ready? Here's some of the suggestions for this Greek word. Reasonableness, generosity, goodwill, friendliness, magnanimity, charity, mercy, leniency, big-heartedness.

I don't love that one. Moderation, forbearance, and gentleness are some of the attempts to capture the meaning of this word. It is a very flexible, expansive word.

[16 : 45] Possibly, the best word, and I say this with humility, is graciousness. Perhaps the ESV translates reasonableness because of the connection of these ideas, right?

If we're going to be fighting for joy, we're going to see that there's a way to do this further in the text, right? Paul certainly seems to be juxtaposing anxiety in verse 6 with joy in verse 4 and peace in verse 7.

And then in verse 8, he tells us to be thoughtful and mindful and to set our minds on particular things. And so I think that's a pretty fair word, reasonableness, right? If we're going to be joyful and peaceful rather than anxious, we will have to be reasonable, right?

Romans 12, 2, transformed by the renewing of our minds. But I think it is important that we see our reasonableness, right, connected to this more expansive idea of graciousness or friendliness, charity, mercy, leniency, all of these ways this word can be translated.

We need to see that the way that we live our lives should reverberate to others the love that God has shown us. God has been gracious to us in Christ.

[18 : 02] Therefore, we should display the same graciousness toward others, right? We should show people the great confidence that we have in our God, which is perhaps why the uninspired verse and chapter numbers, sometimes these drive me crazy, but it's perhaps why the Lord is at hand is included with verse 5, although it sure feels like it belongs with verse 6, right?

Because God is near, right? We can be reasonable, right? Or, as I'm suggesting, we can be gracious towards others because God has been gracious toward us.

So we need to fight for our joy, for not to be anxious. We're to be gracious towards others by displaying our confidence in this gracious God.

And we're to turn to God with all of our concerns. Verse 6 and verse 7, right? The Lord is at hand. You want to insert here a therefore at the beginning of verse 6, right?

Because God is at hand, because he is a present help in times of trouble, we can go to him in our anxiety. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.

[19 : 32] And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. There is an alternative to your anxiety and mine.

Faith. The alternative to our sinful anxiety is faith. We can not be anxious about anything, but in everything, we can turn to God because he is at hand.

Now, the prayer and the supplication and requests were meant to take their troubles to him with our synonyms that refer to direct petitions made of God.

God, I believe that Paul uses the repetition to note that our going to God with all of our concerns will be often and it will be varied. There are a lot of things for us to be concerned about.

To not be anxious, we will need to pray and we will need to pray and we will need to pray. Paul also instructs that we should do this with thanksgiving.

[20 : 40] The fact that God has done so much already ought to give us the confidence that he will continue to do so. Why are we so prayerless so often?

I think we've forgotten God's goodness to us already. We ought to be driven to prayer when we remember how very kind he's been to us. We are in the midst of a tough circumstance.

It can be difficult to remember or to notice anything positive. I will tell you for myself, I have to put a great deal of mental effort into remembering all of God's goodness to me.

As we say often, we are slow learners and we are quick to forget. We far too often find ourselves prayerless in trials. No wonder we become anxious.

Prayerlessness is a sign of faithlessness. When we don't pray, it is because we have forgotten who is in control. We too often think that we are in control and when that illusion comes crashing down, you think you can, I got this, and something outside of your control just comes crashing down.

[21 : 55] I'm not in control of anything. I can do so little. We become anxious. Of course we do. We think we can control our world. The world is falling apart. We ought to rightly be anxious in those moments except that we know who is in control.

It is a very good thing that we are not in control when we recognize who is in control. Peter writes in 1 Peter chapter 5 verse 6 and following, humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you.

Humble yourself. Recognize who you are under God and his might. Verse 7, casting all your anxieties on him because he cares for you.

Peter goes on to say, be sober minded, be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion. Seeking someone to devour. You may be familiar with verse 8 of 1 Peter chapter 5. It's often disconnected from this idea of casting our anxieties on God. Who cares for us? So recognize that your anxiety is a spiritual thing happening. The devil wants to steal away your joy and your peace because it doesn't display who our God is to us in Christ.

[23 : 27] We become ineffective witnesses when we're as worried about the things that the world is worried about. We're all tied up in knots because of the coronavirus or the next election cycle.

Our God continues to reign. He is who he said he is and will continue to be forever. We sing a song often on Sunday mornings called What a Friend We Have in Jesus.

And it's a little sing-songy so maybe we miss sometimes the beauty of the words. I love this verse. Oh what peace we often forfeit.

Oh what needless pain we bear. All because we do not carry everything to God in prayer. We can take our anxieties to God.

Verse 7 says in the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. I think Paul means for there to be some duality in what he's saying here.

[24 : 31] I think he's first referring to Romans 5 1. Therefore since we have been justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. The peace we have with God ought to inform the rest of the way that we live.

And I do also think he means a feeling. A feeling of comfort in the midst. of trial because this is a peace that surpasses all understanding.

People ought to look at the way we walk through trial as Christians and think us strange. Like those Christians that the author of Hebrews writes to joyfully accepted the plundering of your property.

People ought to be looking at us that way and asking us about the hope that we have. Jesus talks about anxiety in Luke chapter 12. You may be familiar with much of this passage.

It's so good for our souls to hear it again. Beginning in verse 22. And Jesus said to his disciples, therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on.

[25 : 32] For life is more than food and the body more than clothing. Consider the ravens. They neither sow nor reap. They have neither storehouse nor barn. And yet God feeds them.

Of how much more value are you than the birds? And which of you, by being anxious, can add a single hour to a span of life? If then you were not able to do a small thing as that, why are you anxious about the rest?

Consider the lilies, how they grow, they neither toil nor spin. Yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass, which is alive in the field today, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith? And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried. For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you.

Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. The Lord is at hand. He is working grand purposes for the sake of his name and for our good.

[26 : 49] We can take everything to him. And the promise as we're doing this is that we will have an un-understandable peace.

Great joy accompanies recognizing your position, your place in the world, your inability to control your circumstance. We act, the birds are actually looking for food, but God's providing it.

We're not ultimately in control, ever. The account of the conversion of Blaise Pascal, who was a 17th century French mathematician, a wonderful, fascinating man, was found on a piece of parchment sewn into his coat eight years after his death.

I love that he wrote this down and had it sewn into his coat. It was found this many years later. This is what he wrote. Year of Grace, 1654, Monday 23 November, Feast of Saint Clement.

From about half past ten at night to about half an hour after midnight, fire. God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, not of philosophers and scholars. Certitude, heartfelt joy, peace.

[28 : 05] God of Jesus Christ, God of Jesus Christ, my God and your God, joy, joy, joy, tears of joy, Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ, may I never be separated from him.

Isn't that cool? I'll write that on the inside of my jacket. So we need to fight for joy. We need to be gracious towards others. We need to turn to God with all of our concerns.

And fourthly, dehabituate by rehabituating. Verse eight and nine. Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, there's any excellence or there's anything worthy of praise.

Think about these things which you have learned and received and heard and seen in me. Practice these things and the God of peace will be with you. Right? So he's talking both about thought and practice.

Right? And you see, we could, I mean, we don't have time this morning to talk about all these things, true, honorable, just. But what he's saying is take you worry and put them on things that are worthy of your thoughts.

[29 : 09] Right? You're dehabituating by rehabituating. You're changing the way that you think. You're focusing on these wonderful promises of God to us in Christ.

And the things that they've seen modeled in the life of Paul, that you see modeled in the text and in leaders in your life, that you ought to practice these things.

Be about the work of God as well. We are creatures, of habit. When I drive into Dahlenega, when I hit that first light in town, I instinctively turn right.

It's hard for me not to get into that turning lane. If I'm heading right into the middle of downtown or I need to go left out towards 52, I've got to make a real mental effort as I'm coming down the hill.

Don't go right, don't go right, don't go right.

Because we're creatures of habit. We just do things instinctively. I bet that each one of you put on a particular shoe this morning first. any thought to it at all. I challenge you to start paying attention to what you do.

[30 : 06] I put on my right sock and my right shoe and then I put on my left sock and my left shoe. I don't put on both socks. I don't know why, but it's the way I do it. And if there was something morally wrong with the way I was putting on my socks and shoes, I would have to train myself to do it differently.

I would have to rehabilitate myself to do it. The scripture said you must put on your left shoe first. I'd have to really work at doing such a thing.

And so if we're to not be anxious, if we're to set our minds on the things we're to set our minds on, we're going to have to work at this.

Paul said in 1 Timothy chapter 4 or 7, train yourself for godliness. Train or discipline yourself for godliness.

In a book called The Christian Counselor's Manual by J. Adams, he addresses this, this re-habituating and there's a he in here. He's talking about a counselee and he'll mention the counselor.

[31 : 04] But he says this, how may I discipline myself, he, the counselee, may ask insistently. First, the counselor must indicate that the word discipline clearly shows that godliness cannot be zapped.

It cannot be whipped up like instant pudding. Godliness doesn't come that way. Discipline means work. It means sustained daily effort.

The word Paul used is the one from which the English word gymnastics and gymnasium have been derived. It is a term related to athletics. An athlete becomes an expert only by years of hard practice.

There are no instant athletes. It takes years of regular practice to achieve athletic skill. And so in the same way as we wrestle with the anxiety in our life, and again, I'm not talking about disorders, I'm

talking about the spiritual anxiety that most of us are going to experience, right?

We're going to have to train ourselves to think differently. most of my life next to the sink in our kitchen, Philippians chapter 4 verse 8 was written on a note card and stuck.

[32 : 17] We lived various places and that same note card was stuck in that spot. Whatever's true, whatever's honorable, whatever's just, etc. was up there. And as a child, I just never thought to ask my mother why it was put there.

But now as an adult, as a pastor, I just thought, Mom, Philippians 4.8, why was that there? And my mom shared with me her lifelong struggle with anxiety.

What my mom was doing was retraining herself. She was rehabilitating by going, this is not what I need to be thinking about. What I need to be thinking about are things that are true and honorable and just and pure and lovely. She was changing the way that she thought.

So, beloved, if you want to fight your anxiety, it's not going to be found in popular psychology. It's going to be found in knowing the promises of God to you in Christ and thinking about those things, meditating on those things.

You've got to change the way you think. It's a shocker by changing the way you think. God's empowered word retraining the way you think.

[33 : 36] So, we need to fight for joy, be gracious towards others, turn to God with all of our concerns, and dehabituate by rehabilitating. May we be a people who lay faithless anxiety down for joyful, peaceful faithfulness.

May we be a people that live in a way that the world would see how very reasonable we are because of how great Jesus Christ is. Let's pray together.