

Philippians 4:10–23

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[0 : 00] That's Philippians 4, verses 10 to 23. If you're able, please stand for the reading of God's word. I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at length you have revived your concern for me.

You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound.

In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me. Yet it was kind of you to share my troubles.

And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. Even in Thessalonica, you sent me help for my needs once and again.

Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit. I have received full payment and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God.

[1 : 13] And my God will supply every need of yours, according to his riches and glory in Christ Jesus. To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen. Greet every saint in Christ Jesus, the brothers who are with me greet you.

All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

You may be seated. Good morning. I'm going to check your volume. Well, good morning. Good to see you here today.

And I look forward over the coming weeks to watch the shadow dwellers shift to the sun as the temperatures drop. And later this fall, you'll be here in coats, looking for any glimmer of light in the skies to warm you during our service.

Welcome to the last stop before we head across the street into our own building. Praise the Lord. If you're visiting today, a special welcome to you.

[2 : 24] You're joining us on a Sunday where we close down our time in Paul's letter to the Philippian church. We titled the series at the outset of the summer, Regaining Gospel Gladness.

Regaining Gospel Gladness. And I think it presupposes at least a couple of things. It presupposes that Christians as individual men and women and Christians as churches can at times go through seasons where they lose their gospel gladness, where it got up, where it's gone missing.

Not only that, it presupposes that the church in Philippi was in just such a condition, that they had somehow lost their gospel gladness.

And one of Paul's aims in writing is to have them regain it. I want to speak today as we close the letter, drawing on some of that evidence within the letter, as well as the particular contribution of this closing text.

Let me pray. Our Heavenly Father, we now look to your word, guide us in it for the welfare of our own soul and for the strengthening of this church, for the gladness of your people.

[3 : 50] In Christ's name, Amen. Years after graduating from college, my wife, Lisa, and I returned to the campus for a class reunion.

And while there, we attended a meeting where the president of the school was addressing those who had come and he closed his time with an open question and answer session.

I will never forget one particular question, nor his answer. The question was this, Mr. President, what is the largest challenging distinction between students who entered college at your age versus the students that are now coming through in this age?

And without missing a beat, he responded, the challenges of mental health. I think he's right. I think he's right.

I think in my day, some ancient day long ago, issues of mental health were not as vocalized or authenticated as legitimate.

[5 : 05] You might say that in many respects, they were at times pushed under the rug. Fortunately, in this age, they continued to gain validity within our broader culture.

I think most recently of our Olympic athlete, Simone Biles, who was a gymnast and she brought our attention to the issue of mental health. Or even more recently, Naomi Osaka, the tennis player, who again said, in withdrawing from the French Open, I have issues of my whole being regarding my mental health.

We're not robotic in our ability to perform as athletes. I'm glad for the larger conversation.

I also want us to know that Christians and churches can struggle with their mental health. Let me put it this way, a subset of mental health to encompass one's spiritual health, one's spiritual shape, one's circumstantial condition.

I think of the church at Philippi then and wonder if Paul feels as though he's been writing a church that's been diagnosed with spiritual depression.

[6 : 35] I don't know if you've ever looked at the letter that way, but it's come to me over the course of the summer. The signs of depression within the congregation emerge through the evidentiary material in the text under the banner of the circumstances of life had so weighed them down that it depressed their spiritual state.

Let me give you just a few. Their founding pastor was imprisoned and really living day to day on death row.

They carried that weight. It discouraged their soul. Their short-term missionary of Paphroditus, who had launched out on a laudable effort to assist people who had needs, himself almost died while in rout and was just now in recovery.

That took the wind out of their soul. The circumstances of their own neighborhood were such that the letter indicates in chapter one that there was opposition from their neighbors in regard to the message they were preaching.

Beyond that, we all know that one of the signs of depression is the eruption of anger. And we know in chapter two, he says that there's a midst and a mindset of grumbling.

[7 : 59] He even goes further. Disputation, that he's watching anger begin to erupt within individuals in the congregation. He goes even further. There's friction within long-time friendships.

Yodia and Syntyche are no longer in agreement. Last week, we also see he's addressing the anxieties that are in the congregation. Anxiety, a massive indicator of mental health and, at times, depression.

And he's trying to cure their anxiety through the psychology of the way he works with them to lean back upon the Lord. Not only that, a sign of depression is the inability to focus your attention on all that which is good.

You begin to tunnel down in. And so even last week, he says, you know, put your mind on these things. Put your mind on these things. It's true. The church in Philippi was undergoing a season of spiritual depression because their joy had become unwound as they had tethered themselves or been tethered by the harsh circumstances of life.

Can you identify? Interestingly, Martin Lloyd-Jones, who was a medical doctor before he was a pastor in the midst of the 20th century, published a book in 1965.

[9 : 30] I commend it to you. Its title was *Spiritual Depression, Its Causes, and Cures*. In 1963 and 64, he devoted no fewer than 21 consecutive sermons to spiritual depression, its causes, and cures.

I guess what I'm trying to say by way of introduction is that the condition of the church through seasonal moments of depression are circumstantially related and we need to address them.

They are not altogether new. You are not alone. They were dealing with this in churches in the midst of the last cultural revolution through Lloyd-Jones' work in the mid-60s.

We were dealing with this in the early church at Philippi. And so today, as we close the letter, let's consider afresh the unique contribution of this text to its cure.

Throughout the letter, Paul has been arguing that the cure is to be found in the recovery of the Christian mind.

[10 : 54] That our minds must be strengthened if our outlook is to change.

that there's an internal work of the mind. It goes all the way back to chapter 2 and verse 5. Have this mind among yourselves which is in Christ Jesus.

It goes back to what we learned earlier in chapter 3 and 4 where this mindset of Christ was an eternal perspective.

And the eternal perspective governed their temporal conditions so that Paul was ever throughout able to say that he was rejoicing in the Lord.

Even the opening word of our text today, I rejoiced in the Lord greatly. He was rejoicing in the Lord because it is the Lord and his work and his mindset that actually loved us to such an extent that he went to secure our salvation.

[12 : 05] That was his concern for others. And in the securing of our salvation as we return to the cross, as we remember what he's done, as we look at what Jesus has said in regard to his love for us, as we understand where it is we are going and returning to heaven, it will substantially put hard road beneath our feet to endure the circumstances that would often come to depress us.

The mind, the mind. Interestingly, look at verse 10, we find the ninth and tenth occurrence of the word in the original where we get this idea of the mind or the mindset or thinking.

Here it is, I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that at length you have revived your concern for me, your thought for me, your mind has now been redirected toward me.

You were indeed concerned for me, you were indeed, in other words, you thought of me, your mind was with me, but you didn't have opportunity. So what he's trying to say in the close of his letter is while you are to have the mindset of Christ and while the mindset of Christ will move you relationally with one another to find agreement in Christ.

As the mindset of Christ controls the things you decide to think about every day, so too the mindset of remaining on mission is either means by which the church recovered their gladness or a manifestation that their gladness was on the road to recovery.

[14 : 04] That's what the text means here. I rejoice that at length you revived your concern for me. Past tense. Well, what was that concern? They had brought Epaphroditus and threw him a financial gift to Paul for the advancement of his gospel work in Asia so that Paul could pay the bills along the way to see the gospel continue to go.

And for a while it seems that they had neglected that, not accomplished that, not had opportunity for that. But what he says here is I am now rejoicing for at length your mind is back on me.

Not me as in self-focus, but me as in we are laboring together for the gospel. Let me put it to you as simply as I can.

The recovery of your mind, which will begin to help garner your strength to move from spiritual depression, is in part due to your reinvestment in the mission.

That's what Paul has put forward here. I'd like to talk about this then just for a moment. We ought to demonstrate that we are of such a mind that we are concerned for other people who are giving themselves to advance the gospel.

[15 : 46] So ask yourself, am I personally, privately, individually, and are we corporately revived in mind to make ongoing financial commitment to those who are advancing the gospel?

It is a means of help, a means of strengthening of our own soul. Let me put it to you this way.

We are to treat spiritual depression in part by showing genuine interest in others, which will be manifest in contributions that they need, which we presently have.

Wouldn't that be a beautiful thing? And here's the thing, is that when our mental health isn't good, and we've all been there, it's really hard to get outside of a self-absorbed spiraling into our own state.

And it's really healthy to force myself to place myself in situations where I'm invested in others in regard to the progress of the gospel.

[17 : 12] I had a recent example of this for myself. Just the other evening, we had one of our global ministry partners in town, Kristen Ismert, and she was at the law, and she was talking about her work in Turkey, and I had a full day and really wondered whether I wanted to get up and go and listen to all that's going on.

And what I found with about 20 other people of the congregation who attended was that it was so healthy for my mind to listen to somebody talk about their world and what God was doing through the thick and thin and advancing the gospel.

It was healthy. I was rejuvenated and hopefully she rejoiced in the Lord as this concern was by our own church demonstrated.

What's interesting though is when you're down, you only want sympathy, not necessarily instruction.

Right? Right? I think of Paul Holliday who said according to modern usage there's little difference if any between consolation and sympathy. To console someone is for all practical purposes to sympathize with them in their loss.

[18 : 34] But he writes the ancient Greeks and Romans carefully distinguished between ancient consolers who were by no means unsympathetic to those afflicted with grief.

However, they understood their primary task to be not one of sharing in the grief of others only, but one of removing the grief by rational argument, frank, and frank exhortation.

That's exactly what Paul does in the following verses. I mean, this is the most surprising moment in the text as he moves from what he says about you, verse 10, four times over, verse 10, to what he now says about I or himself, verses 11 through 13.

This is a fascinating little moment. Paul says after expressing that they have had concern for him, he says, not that I'm speaking of being in need, for I've learned in whatever situation I am to be content.

I know how to be brought low. I know how to abound in every circumstance. I've learned the secret of facing plenty and hungry, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me. I mean, this is Paul at his his eternal perspective best.

[19 : 54] This is not just sympathetic, empathetic listening. This is not just put my arm around you. This is let me put one hand on each shoulder, look you in the eye and console you.

Let me tell you that I am grateful that you are now reinvesting in the mission. Not that I necessarily needed all that because I can do with or without.

In other words, he's basically saying I'm way ahead of you guys on the trail. I've learned. And what an ironic thing, this verse that we take out of context so easily.

I can do all things through him who strengthens me to know that it is Paul enduring day by day, life on death row, able to endure and persevere in the midst of nothing.

What a man. I think of Plutarch who was a Greek philosopher and writer, a biographer as well, probably most famous for his biographies of individuals.

[21 : 06] he was also a contemporary of Paul. But listen to what he says about what we need sometimes when all we want is sympathy.

He says, quote, for we do not have need of those who like tragic choruses weep and wail with us in unwanted circumstances, but of those who will speak to us frankly and instruct us that grief, self-abasement, are in every circumstance useless, serving no purpose and showing no sense.

Now, I don't know that I would go quite as far as Plutarch goes, but you get the sentiment. There are times where our mental health, our spiritual depression needs people to come along and instruct us and to realize that we can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

How are you feeling today? The recovery of your mind will be manifest by a return to the mission, which will be evidenced by lifting up your sight from merely yourself and your condition and employing yourself for the advance of the gospel through others.

This concern for others is in the second half of the text manifest in a participation in the Christian cause.

[22 : 32] Can I look at verse 14 with you? Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble. And you Philippians yourself know that in the beginning of the gospel when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving except you only.

Even in Thessaloniki, you sent help for my needs once and again. That return to the word partnership is embedded in our text twice.

you can see it. No church entered into partnership with me. That means financial, contractual arrangement to support his gospel work.

And it's also there in the word share, yet it was kind of you to share my trouble. This goes all the way back to chapter 1 and verse 5 and 7 where he was grateful for their partnership in the gospel.

This is what it has to do then. the unique contribution of this text to regaining gospel gladness in the heart of the church is in part as we reinvest in the mission that others would hear the gospel word.

[23 : 45] You know, one of my mentors said that the problem in the church is it has a life cycle. It starts with a mission. The mission becomes a movement.

The movement eventually gives way to a monument. The monument then is something that we reflect on by way of memory. And once you're only thinking about memory, you might as well be in a mausoleum.

Mission, movement, monument, memory, mausoleum. The goal of Christ Church Chicago is to keep us on mission as long as possible.

and to restore yourself to mission means a financial contribution to the work that will expand the gospel from that corner for the next 50 years.

Do you know? Do you believe that the contributions to this church will make it able for someone 20, 30, 40, 50 years from now?

[24 : 49] What you do in the next 12 months will make it possible for someone 30, 40, 50 years from now to hear the gospel. The recovery of the mind manifests through the reinvestment in the mission, the unique contribution of this text.

And notice then what Paul says by way of close, not only the concern for others, not only participation in the Christian cause, but notice there is a promise here that God will supply all your needs.

Did you see that at the end? There's a word of comfort. Verse 19, and my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches and glory in Christ Jesus.

To God our Father be glory forever and ever. Amen. He ends up in this doxological moment of praise. God will meet your need.

Physical, material, psychological, emotional, relational, and there are needs.

[26 : 05] He will walk with you. He will supply every need. Notice, according to his riches and glory that are in Christ Jesus.

It isn't just like he's saying, I'll get a little thing done for you. He goes, I'll get it done with the wealth that you have in Christ. The wealth of Christ goes to the extent of the salvation of your soul.

God will get it done in life and in death for Christ has the full resources of heaven at his disposal to comfort you, to console you, to help you, to sit with you, weep with you, walk with you.

well, as we close our summer in the book of Philippians, I praise God for this simple word, the importance of the recovery of our mind, and for the particularity of this text, made manifest as we continue to make investment in the mission.

Christ mind, Christ mission, Christ church, Chicago, your destiny.

[27 : 39] Our heavenly father, we now turn to the Lord's supper, for in this meal is all our strength. Help us then in Christ's name to receive it with joy.

Amen.