

Philippians 4:4-9

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[0 : 00] I invite you, as Brad just said, to turn with me to Philippians chapter 4. We're going to continue in our series there.

If you don't have a Bible with you, there are some on the back table, and the words will also be up here. This is a rather well-known passage, perhaps the best-known passage within the book of Philippians.

And so I approach it with fear and trembling. The Apostle Paul says in the Spirit, 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.

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.

[1 : 30] 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 reported to the United States Coast Guard Academy for swab summer in the summer of 2003, which I believe is when the incoming class was being born, which makes me feel old.

But, swab summer is a pretty, if you know anything of the academy, it's a pretty stressful environment. So, when Major Jim Groves, the Officer's Christian Fellowship staff person, if you know Carl Crabtree, it is his predecessor's predecessor.

When he made sure that all of the incoming swabs who went to chapel memorized Philippians 4, 6, and 7, because they were enduring a great hardship.

And those verses are handed out as a lifeline to many Christians who are experiencing worry, concern, anxiety.

[2 : 39] And with good reason, they directly address it. And I actually, I invite you now, as we consider this passage together, to call to mind a topic of concern for you in particular.

Something that's weighing on you right now. As we're going along, consider how all of these things apply to this particular circumstance in your life.

Perhaps you actually come here today relatively unburdened, relatively carefree. First off, congratulations, and I'm happy for you.

And if that is the case, you know, praise the Lord. Right? This passage talks about coming to him with thanksgiving. Perhaps you are burdened for someone else as well, though.

And you can think, then, about how this might inform your prayers for them. And if you have struggled with anxiety or worry for any length of time, you might have your guard up right now about this particular passage.

[3 : 55] You might actually be sick of these verses, because Christians tend to throw it out like candy corn, right? Like, it's just, it's the easy thing to throw at someone who is experiencing anxiety and worrying.

For many, it might be the only advice they hear about this from other Christians. And it might be ripped out of its context, robbing of its power, or it may have been misused.

We'll talk about that in a moment, about how we could misuse this in our lives, rather than comforting us that can actually add to our burdens. So let's place it within its context, and we'll actually see that this passage isn't really about anxiety at all.

There is a main point, and it's not that. This is an outworking of that main point. And we'll see how that actually makes verse 6 more powerful in the lives of Christians.

So let's pray again real quick, because I am anxious over this passage. And then we will begin to look at it with, I hope, fresh eyes.

[5 : 07] Lord, I ask that in these moments, the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all our hearts would be acceptable. In your sight, oh Lord, our rock and our redeemer.

Father, I ask that you would guide me into clarity, and that you would guide us to yourself. For our good and for your glory, we ask it in Christ's name.

Amen. When we look at this passage, probably verses 6 and 7 are the most famous, and so they stick out to us the most if we've been in church for a while.

But if you read them all together, it looks something like a stream of consciousness from Paul.

There's not like, yeah, I mean, common thematic elements, but it's just boom, boom, boom, a lot of different things piled together.

But of course it's not a stream of consciousness. I think if we pay careful attention, we will see that there is an order to this. There is a structure to this.

[6 : 16] There's a pattern to be found. And I think that that pattern looks like instruction, instruction, truth.

Instruction, instruction, truth. Instruction, instruction, truth. There is a rhythm, a cadence to this passage.

Paul is saying, here is what you need to do because here is a foundation upon which to stand. It looks like this. Instruction, instruction, truth.

Rejoice. Show your gentleness. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious. Make your requests to God. The peace of God will guard you. Set your mind above. Follow my example. The God of peace will be with you.

[7 : 23] That's the cycle. Instruction, instruction, truth. And what's more, we're going to see that each of the cycles, they conclude with the truth, it's the same truth expressed with fresh words each time.

And so what Paul is encouraging us to do is to latch onto one key truth and ground ourselves on it and then press it into every facet of our lives and it is going to impact everything from our attitude, rejoice, to the way we handle difficulties, do not be anxious, to how we use our minds, think about these things, and even to all of our behavior, practice these things.

And so before we look at any of the commands, the instructions of this passage, let's look first to the truth that undergirds them, the place from which we stand while we walk in them because it is the foundation of it all.

And he says, he states it three ways. Verse 5, verse 7, verse 9. The Lord is at hand. Then he says, the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

He says, the God of peace will be with you. Now those aren't identical statements. But Paul clearly has one thing in mind, one central idea.

[9 : 12] In 5, he tells us that the Lord is near. In 7, he reminds us that the Lord brings peace near to us in our inmost being, our hearts and minds.

And in verse 9, he ties those two things together. God's nearness and his peace. The God of peace will be with you.

And so this whole passage is built around the idea, springs from this truth, that God is near his people.

And that brings them peace. He brings them peace. peace. And so, for any of this, for all of this to apply to us, we must first be his people because he comes near to his people.

And all of these things are a product of that. All of the comforts of this passage, all of the instructions come to us from that place where we belong to him.

[10 : 20] So I invite anyone who has not yet come to Christ, repented and believed. You see, he talks about the gospel.

The gospel is the central message of Christianity. It is the good news of Jesus Christ that he made peace. In Colossians chapter 1, Paul said, for in him, that is Christ, all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.

God came to us in human flesh. And through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

What that means is that there is enmity, hostility between sinners like you and me and a truly, perfectly, radiantly holy God.

There is not peace between us yet because he is so gloriously good. He so tremendously loves and sent his son to make peace.

[11 : 31] Bearing our sins, our guilt on his cross, he paid the penalty that I could not, that you could not, and freely offers peace between heaven and earth, between God and you, to all who would run to Christ for salvation and call upon him.

And this God, the God of peace, who made peace between heaven and earth, a holy God and sinful man, that peace doesn't just apply to the ceasing of hostilities because verse 7 of Philippians 4, says that he came to bring peace to our inner being, to our inner person, to us.

When we're reconciled to the peacemaking God, he draws near and our inner person is blessed with his peace. Is that, is that your view of God? The God who makes peace?

The God who draws near and brings peacefulness to you? Unfortunately, I think so many have a different view of who God is and what he's like.

But this is what his word says of him. This is what his actions, the cross, have shown of him. And if we are resting in the gospel, we will look to him and know that he is the God of peace.

[13 : 06] And look to him for that. Many in this room are probably familiar with the Narnia series. I'm double dipping two weeks in a row on C.S. Lewis.

Children, if you're not familiar with the Narnia series, children find their way into another realm where a redemption story happens, much as it has happened in this world.

The Christ figure is embodied by the magnificent lion Aslan. He is not like the lions of this world. He is giant and radiant and far more powerful.

And it was he who shaped Narnia by his voice. Today we're talking about peace and interestingly enough, probably the most famous line, like single line, about Aslan is about how he's not safe.

Right? Lucy asks, well, is he quite safe? She's asking a talking beaver because, you know, again, it's Narnia. Safe, said Mr. Beaver. Who said anything about safe?

[14 : 24] Of course he ain't safe. But he's good. He's the king. If you've ever visited Narnia in a book or in a movie or a wardrobe, you know that Aslan is terrifically dangerous.

He is, he is terrifically dangerous. Even the white witch, Jadus, cannot face him. She has to resort to strategies that keep him at a distance or somehow embroiled in something else.

In all the world, he has no rival. The interesting thing is, as dangerous as he is, and he is, once you're on his team, there's no safer place to be.

Though a thousand armies march on you, you would not tremble if his soft, giant paws pressed the grass beside you and his golden mane grazed your cheek and you're warmed by his calm, steady breath in the air.

You wouldn't fear a thousand armies. You would be fearful for them. Those who seek to do violence to his beloved, they are in peril because he isn't safe and therefore, you are.

[15 : 49] You are. the main point of this passage is not what to do when you're anxious. Instead, it is the God of peace is with you and that changes everything about your life.

And these three rounds of instructions, including what to do with your anxiety, are examples of how to build your life on that fact that God is near and he is the God of peace.

That's the foundation. That's the truth that's restated three times upon which this whole passage is built. Each cycle ends with that thought and grounds the instructions that are there.

So let's look at the three cycles and see how we can build our lives on this firm foundation. Cycle one we see in verses four and five.

Remember, it's in instruction, instruction, truth. Verse four says, Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I will say, rejoice.

[17 : 11] As we said in chapter three, the first time Paul told us to rejoice, that is a difficult command, isn't it? It's a difficult command to give and it's a difficult command to obey.

I can command you to do all sorts of things. Pick this up, go over there, say these things. I could even tell you to act joyfully, put a smile on your face, cheer, clap your hands, but I can't control the reality of your spirit.

I can't command actual inward like the soul experience of rejoicing. That's not a power I have. And we can't even individually decide on our own, I'm going to rejoice in this thing unless it's worth rejoicing over.

to rejoice you must find something that's worthy of rejoicing. Which is why Paul has been pairing the command each time he says rejoice, he's been pairing it with commands about where to fix our minds.

He wants us to be amazed, he has to show us something amazing. If he wants us to trust, he means to show us something trustworthy. If he wants us to rejoice, he must show us something worth rejoicing over.

[18 : 45] What's the connection then between rejoice in the Lord always, again I say rejoice, and the Lord is near. I imagine that you would be pretty pumped if you were invited to your favorite actor's home or your favorite athlete or the president or a king.

The Lord is at hand teaches us that we are constantly ceaselessly with the Lord of glory who is more prestigious, more wonderful than any human person we could spend time with.

You walk with Haslam step by step and day by day. Who is a higher, a more prestigious companion, the greatest of human beings he formed out of dust.

Christ. What's more, what can separate you from him? Nothing and no one.

Dinner, if you were invited to dinner at a celebrity's home, you would walk out the door at the end of the night. But nothing and no one can separate you from the love of God.

[20 : 14] You are his forever. Not by your strength by his. The good shepherd has come for his own and no one can take them out of his hand.

Friends, is your heart warmed? Are you being led towards rejoicing? I hope so. I hope so. Not by way of command, but by way of contemplation.

Contemplating what you have, that the Lord, the Lord, is at hand. Instruction, instruction.

Verse 5 says, let your reasonableness be known to everyone. If you're reading the English Standard Version, which is what we have on the screen, it says reasonableness, but then it has a note, or gentleness.

All of the other translations pick gentleness here. Everywhere else, the ESV has this Greek word. It's also gentleness. I think the reason they rendered it reasonableness here is because it's in the context of conflict.

[21 : 22] Verse 2 is about a conflict in the church, a disagreement. And gentleness in the context of conflict looks like being reasonable one with another. So whether it's gentleness or the reasonability that comes from gentleness in the midst of conflict, how does this relate to the truth, the Lord is near.

When are we ungentle or unreasonable with others? We tend not to be gentle when we are afraid. We tend not to be gentle when we are insecure. or we tend not to be gentle when we are prideful. What does the Lord is near, what does that do to all of these things? We tend not to be gentle when we're afraid.

It's hard to be afraid when Aslan stands beside you grazing your shoulder. We tend not to be gentle when we're insecure.

[22 : 48] It's hard to feel insecure when the one who upholds the universe by the word of his power is by your side. We tend not to be gentle when we're prideful.

Who can feel prideful standing before the king? If we have eyes to see that he is here, the Lord's presence dissolves every pretense which would make us un-gentle.

people. And so both of these are built on the Lord is near. If Aslan stands next to you, that feels pretty great.

Rejoice! If Aslan stands next to you, that kills the things that make us un-gentle. Cycle number two.

Verses six and seven. Do not be anxious about anything, 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 understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

[24 : 17] This is an extraordinary passage. It's why we quote it so much. But the sad irony is that the people who would be blessed by this the most have often heard it quoted to them in a flippant and dismissive way and they've been made to become calloused towards it.

If you've been struggling against anxiety for a long time, you might be sick of this verse for a number of reasons. First off, when it's just quoted in isolation, we lose that context of the nearness

of God that robs it of its power.

It makes it feel like this passage is saying, okay, lob up some prayer requests to a far-off God, see what happens. Or perhaps someone is reading something into this passage that isn't there.

Have you ever heard someone say, you shouldn't talk to a therapist because this says go to God? So, does it say that?

I mean, it says go to God. Does it say anything about anything else though? Sometimes we over-read the scriptures and prohibit that which is not prohibited. So, certainly, pursue other helps.

[25 : 51] Just make sure you do go to the Lord with your cares. I think sometimes that is difficult for us. Or, perhaps someone has used this verse ungenerally, as we've just seen in the last verse, and said, you're sinning if you have anxiety.

Right? I mean, do not be anxious. That's an imperative. It is a command. And so they say, you know, you are guilty for feeling anxiety, which increases anxiety all the more.

Of course, reading that that way is precisely the opposite of what Paul is trying to do here. Clearly, this whole passage is a comfort, not a condemnation.

Sometimes people read it dismissively. Some who have struggled with worry and sorrow and anxiety and concerns and their cares, when they've shared them with other Christians, have found that people use verse 6 to kind of like end the conversation rather than begin it.

Yeah, okay, well, go pray to the Lord about that. Make a request done to him and don't come back to me until you're done with your worry. Right, is kind of the way we can use this flippantly or dismissively.

[27 : 23] Paul intends verse 6 to begin a conversation, not shut one down. So, if this has been misused in your life or if you have misused it in someone else's, let's look at this with fresh eyes.

Right, because this verse is not the center of the passage. The center of the passage is the God of peace is near. And that informs how we go about our lives.

What does this have to do with the Lord being near? So many things, and we're going to really basically spend the rest of our time thinking on it.

Our first moment of exploration on that is simply this. You belong to a God who invites you to bring him your troubles and wants you to make your requests known to him.

What a wonderful God we serve. And he has drawn near to us, and he offers us, as we see, that he will guard us, because he cares for us.

[28 : 56] Does that draw you to him and make you want to cast your cares on him? For he cares for you. Another way that this passage can be confusing or perhaps even troublesome to some people is what about those who it says there's a promise of protection here and have not been protected?

I feel like there's a particular set of people who hear this when the Lord offers protection, saying he will guard us and feel that it's a false promise, because terrible things have happened to them. And oftentimes severe anxiety comes from a place where we feel we've not been protected, something truly awful has happened, and our minds and even our bodies are on high alert all the time in case that happens again.

is verse 7 a false promise, an empty one. Two words. First, know what Paul says, the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

The protection is of our inner being that he's talking about here. He's not talking about our physical health, which he knows quite well, right?

[30 : 26] So these are the words of amazing grace, right? Through many dangers, toils, and snares, I have already come. 'Tis grace that brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home.

The second and more importantly, I already hinted at it. If you asked Paul that question, is this promise of protection empty? Because terrible things have happened, he would look at you with compassion in his eyes because he knew what it was to suffer harm, great harm.

The man who here says that the Lord will protect us had already been through beatings, stoning, shipwreck, and was presently imprisoned for the gospel.

And he knew as he would write to Timothy that he would soon be martyred. He knew tremendous suffering, and still he wrote, rejoice, the Lord will protect us.

There's great mystery to that, but at the very least, at the very least, the apostle is not unaware, not unaware of your circumstance, and he wants to offer you the confidence that supported him.

[31 : 54] And it didn't come from him being strong, it came from Christ being strong and with us. And he would guard our hearts and our minds through it all.

And it comes even further from Christ himself. Right? These words are not just Paul's, but they are inspired by our living God.

And it was that same God who came to this world, the same God who declared that he would guard us, suffered greatest in order to guard us.

Cycle three. Instruction, instruction, truth. 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.

[33 : 16] the two instructions are think in a certain way, think about certain things, practice what you have seen in me and the truth is the God of peace will be with you.

What Paul is talking about in verse 8, that first instruction, is often what we call Christian meditation. It's different than the eastern practices of meditation which encourage us to empty our minds.

Christian meditation invites us to fill our minds with particular things. Psalm 1 says, Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers, but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates!

day and night, it is a contemplation over the things of God. And that's what Paul is talking about in verse 8 when he says whatever is true and honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent, and worthy, think about these things.

And then he says, practice what you've seen me do. What you've learned, verse 9, and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things.

[34 : 47] Now, certainly he's talking broadly about the whole Christian life. He's saying, follow my example in discipleship in every way. And I think specifically here today he's talking follow my example in walking in these instructions, these three cycles of instructions that I've been talking about today.

And so, as a preacher, this is kind of a really cool moment for me because in general, when I'm preaching, I'm normally saying, okay, like, when Monday rolls around, do this, think of this way. I'm normally sending the congregation out to do what the word has told us to do, the instruction. But this is an instruction that we can do right now.

Like, we can do all of this right now. So, let's take the time to do that as a congregation together. Kyle's going to come up here in a moment. what we're going to be doing is recognizing together that the Lord encourages us, invites us to bring our burdens to him.

[36 : 08] Let's remember that that leads us to rejoicing because he's here with us. He's offered, promised to guard and protect us. So, friends, here's what we're going to do.

I invited you at the outset to consider what is weighing on your heart and your soul, even if it is for someone else. I'm going to lead us through the very things that Paul has instructed us to do.

We're going to go to him in prayer and we're going to cast our cares on Christ together. We're going to obey this as a congregation together. And then we're going to fill our strength to us all the while knowing that he is here with us and longs to bring us peace because he is good.

Kyle is going to pick up some strings not because of anything mystical but just to help us avoid distracting noises around us. And so I ask will you join me in prayer and in meditation together.

Lord how good is it to belong to so good a God so merciful so wonderful and so near Lord would you help us first first of all to see you rightly to see that you are indeed the God of peace Lord thank you that you made peace by the blood of your cross that we might be reconciled to the living and holy

[38 : 23] God we thank you Lord that that peace is not simply the ceasing of hostilities!

Lord leads you to adopt us as your children and brings you near to us and that you do not cease being the God of peace even then but invite us to cast our cares on you because you care for us and so now Lord we as you have instructed us Lord we make our requests known to you what is man that you are mindful of us it's almost beyond comprehension that you would care for us Lord but you do indeed invite us to lay our burdens down at your feet because you care for us like a father to a child so Lord as we have named our burdens to you we also express to you now how they are particularly burdening our souls in this moment knowing that you long to hear from your

children how good you are oh God that you would do that need need need Thank you.
Lord, as we do these things, Lord, we recognize that as you encourage, that as you invite us to pray
our burdens to you, Lord, that leads our hearts to rejoice in you.

Thank you that there is something worthy of rejoicing over in the scriptures and in our lives. And
Lord, we contemplate this.

[41 : 34] Lord, how much you have shown your concern for us in the cross of Christ. And so, Lord,
we offer words, as Paul instructed us, with thanksgiving to make our requests known to you.

Lord, we offer you words of thanksgiving. That you would care for creatures of dust and invite us to
unburden our souls to you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you, our Lord. Thank you, our Lord.

Thank you, our Lord. So, Lord, we take a moment to pause and consider your truth, who honorable
and just and pure you are.

[43 : 15] How lovely you are. Excellent. And praiseworthy. and Lord as we continue to do that
thank you that you have given us so many guides on how to fill our minds with the joyful beautiful
things that pertain to you and so we walk with David as he does just what you've instructed us to do
to set our minds on these things in Psalm 5 we walk with him and say give ear to my words oh Lord
consider my groaning give attention to the sound of my cry my King and my God for to you do I pray
oh Lord in the morning you hear my voice in the morning I prepare a sacrifice for you and watch for
you are not a God who delights in wickedness evil may not dwell with you the boastful shall not
stand before your eyes you hate all evil doers you destroy those who speak lies the Lord abhors the
bloodthirsty and deceitful man but I through the abundance of your steadfast love will enter your
house and will bow down toward your holy temple in the fear of you let all who take refuge in you
rejoice let them ever sing for joy and spread your protection over them that those who love your
name may exult in you for you bless the righteous oh Lord you cover him with favor as with a shield

Lord we come to you delighting in you that you are the kind of God who makes peace who invites
us to cast our cares on him and by your goodness and by your power promises to be with us
forever we pray all these things with joy with thanksgiving with praise and with eager expectation
knowing that you are good and that you are near because of the blood of Christ Amen We move
now to the celebration of the Lord's Supper which testifies so many of these same truths we have
been talking today about how the Lord is near the Lord is near the Lord is near what does the
incarnation that is Christ taking on flesh and dwelling among us what does that testify and that the
Lord draws near no journey has been farther from heaven's throne down to the earth the form of a
servant to the cross of an insurrectionist to the very grave the author of life went to draw near to us
and this this is that testimony to us each and every time we partake together and proclaim his death
for us it's also the testimony we asked today about the promise in verse 7 of God's protection did
Paul just not know what could befall people no he said that knowing greatest harm in his own life
and the God whom he served the God who he was telling us to go to does too he drew near not just
in proximity but in into our sufferings and knows us even there in fact he knows us better than we
know ourselves because he went all the way

I've not been all the way in the suffering that he has he knows where I could go all the way into the
valley of the shadow of death he's already paved the way so no matter what comes I look to his
sacrifice and I know he is there I was going to read one meditation I want to read another one as
they were eating Jesus took bread and after blessing it broke it gave it to the disciples and said take
eat this is my body for all who have trusted in Christ this is his testimony that he has come for you
let's remember him together and he took a cup and when he had given thanks he gave it to them
saying drink of it all of you this is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many for the
forgiveness of sins friends this is how he made peace for us and he concludes with so great a
testimony that is again the central message of the passage we looked at today he said
I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my
father's kingdom we will be with him near to him present to him forever let's rejoice let's