

**Worry**

JRR#4

October 8, 2023

**Philippians 4:1-9**

<sup>1</sup> Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved. <sup>2</sup> I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. <sup>3</sup> Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.

<sup>4</sup> Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. <sup>5</sup> Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. <sup>6</sup> Do not worry about anything, 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 understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. <sup>8</sup> Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. <sup>9</sup> Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.



Last Sunday we began our October worship series, “The Enemies of Gratitude.” These enemies of gratitude are things that prevent us from having an “attitude of gratitude” and this gets in the way of our relationship with God. Last week we talked about nostalgia. Nostalgia causes us to get stuck in the past, preventing us from seeing and living into God’s plans for our lives and for our church. This week we turn to worry. If nostalgia was a barrier to gratitude, then worry is a roadblock. As we prepare to look at worry, at its negative affects on our faith, and at how to deal with worry, let us pray...

How many of you have invited a friend, a family member, or a neighbor to church, only to be rejected, ridiculed, turned down?... Don't you invite them again anyway?... I think you do if you love them. God does. I begin with this line of questioning because one of our greatest worries in life is the spiritual state of those we love.

In verse 6 Paul writes, *"Do not worry about anything."* This sounds like simple enough advice, doesn't it? Yet this might

be one of the most difficult of all Biblical instructions to actually keep. It might be especially hard for Paul right now. He is writing this letter from prison, bound in chains as he sits on death row. He will soon be executed for preaching the gospel. He has been beaten and almost stoned to death. He has survived shipwreck and many angry mobs. Death now looms close at hand. And Paul says, *"Do not worry about anything."*



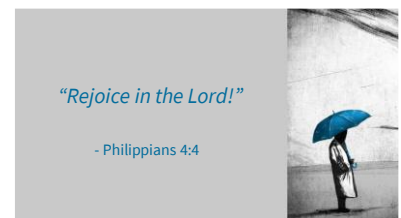
Paul can write these words and really mean them because he is rooted and grounded in Christ. At the beginning of this encouraging letter, in Philippians 1:21, he writes, *"Christ will be exalted now as always in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain."* He is assured of his salvation. He is confident in the role that he has played in advancing the good news of Jesus Christ. And he is deeply invested in this church in Philippi.

This investment is revealed as we turn to the opening verses. Chapter 4 begins with Paul's encouragement to *"stand firm in the Lord."* He then quickly pivots to address some conflict between two members of the church. Paul urges these two women to *"be of the same mind in the Lord."* It is concerning enough that Paul asks for some help from Clement, the recipient of this letter on behalf of the church.

Paul again quickly pivots, and in verse 4 he gives the command to choose the positive. Here we read, *“Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I will say, Rejoice!”* Paul is encouraging the church to do as he is doing, to rejoice in their place in the family of God even as the chaos and evil of the world circles all around them. All around Paul and all around the church, they are being assaulted and persecuted. Families are being torn apart. Fear is reigning in the hearts of many of the believers. Again, Paul’s word is to rejoice in the Lord. Rejoice in your place in God’s family, rejoice in the presence of God’s Spirit in your life, rejoice in the assurance of your salvation. Because they can rejoice in the Lord, Paul tells them, *“Do not worry about anything.”*



To me, what is powerful and amazing about Paul’s instruction here is how incongruent it is with his situation and with the circumstances surrounding the church in Philippi. This instruction probably sounds a bit odd to our 21<sup>st</sup> century ears too, right? Today, pop culture would have us believe in a peace that ignores or detaches or hides from the reality of the world around us. Today culture would teach us not to be concerned about anything but #1, to not get involved in the woes of the world. Paul is not telling us to pretend that everything is OK or to tell ourselves that all is going well. For Paul, nothing is going well. He does not say rejoice in your family, rejoice in your job, rejoice in your financial security, rejoice in your well-being. No, he says, *“Rejoice in the Lord!”*



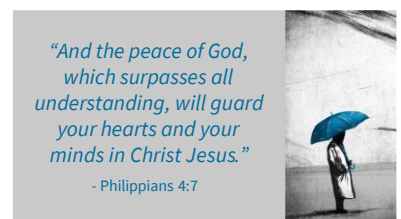
This may be also hard advice for us to follow because we often place our trust in things other than God. We try and make ourselves feel safe or secure, for example, by investing in retirement funds and by purchasing insurance to ward off the effects of aging.

We try and make ourselves feel safe or secure by painting a picture on social media that tells the world that we are doing really well. We go to great lengths to be happy. We buy and invest time and energy in all sorts of things that do not last – that simply cannot last. And when we build our joy on the sands of this world, then we should not be too surprised when the storms come along and take all of that away. When all of that stuff, when all of those things we thought would keep us safe and secure fail, then, we can easily turn to worry.



Paul is not telling us just to think happy thoughts either. This would be another way of avoiding the reality of the world. Paul has been up close and personal with the pain of this world. He has encountered the darkness of this world. He is, at times, like you and like me, overwhelmed by the evil that grips and tears at God's creation. But Paul believes in making a better choice. In verse 6 Paul invites us to take everything to God in prayer. As we saw last week with Moses, again this week we hear the invitation to bring everything to God in prayer. Moses brought his frustration and his anger. Paul invites us to bring that sense of being overwhelmed to God. He invites us to bring our hurts from being rejected or ridiculed or even from being persecuted to God. Paul invites us to bring our rejoicing to God – and to bring our needs and our concerns and everything else. Take it to God in prayer. That is Paul's invitation and his encouragement. What is the basis for this advice, for this encouragement? Paul has lived it out. He has regularly practiced the habit and discipline of prayer.

The “what” or the “why” is found in verse 7. Here we read, *“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”*



When we go to the Lord in prayer, when we trust God with those things that are bringing worry into our hearts and minds, then we find peace. It is a peace that passes all understanding. It is a peace that we cannot generate for ourselves. It is a peace that we cannot find in any of the things of this world, and it is a peace that no one else can give us. The peace of God that passes all understanding is not a peace that we can think our way into. It is not something that we can arrive at logically. It is something that we must trust in. It is something that we, like Paul, must exercise and grow and develop.

My friends, when we can trust in the Lord, when we can bring everything to God, then we are choosing to stand on the promise found in the rest of verse 7. The promise is that this God that can be trusted. We can believe that the Lord our God “*will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*” In the context of the original letter and time, Paul in Rome, and the church in Philippi, they both felt like tiny islands in the middle of a huge and raging sea. The original language that Paul chose was drawn from the military world, and it conveyed the image of a city being besieged.

The original Greek would have translated literally to “stand guard over.” Their faith was the island, and the sea was the pagan culture raging all around them. Both Paul and the church felt like the world was besieging their faith. The image created would be two-fold. The first would be an image of God standing guard over their faith, over their hearts and minds, like a sentry stood guard over his post. The second image would be of God’s peace on patrol, going before them to guard against the worries of this world. This dual image paints a picture of a God who both guards and actively protects us against the worries that can assail our faith. Our worry can sometimes feel like a raging sea, pushing up against our faith. In these times, we too need to remember that God will guard our hearts and minds.

We too need to lean into our God who will stand with us and will guard us when worry begins to grow in us. This is a great image to hold onto as we go forward in faith.



We get another great example of trusting in God in our discipleship book this week. In The Jordan River Rules, author Robert Morgan turns to the story of Rahab and the spies to illustrate what it means to choose to trust in God. Two Israeli spies sneak into Jericho, seeking to learn about this enemy stronghold. They go to a brothel to hide out, to lay low. Where else would two foreigners go to blend in? Rahab hides the spies in some flax drying on the roof. Well, the Canaanites are on to them. Someone saw them go into Rahab's house and the guards begin pounding on the door. Rahab knew why they were there pounding on her door. The spies knew why the Canaanites were there. In that moment, she had a choice to make.

Trusting in the God that she longed to know, Rahab had a decision to make. Would she reveal their hiding place to save her own skin, dooming them to death? Or would she choose to trust God? The spies chose to trust Rahab, to trust that God had led them to this place. Instead of taking matters into their own hands, instead of allowing worry and fear to cloud their thinking, they chose to trust God. Rahab chooses God. She sends the guards on a wild good chase and then sends the spies off to safety, using a crimson cord to lower the spies down through a window in the city wall.



You probably know that the same cord that Rahab used to lower the spies to safety in the middle of the night was the same cord that marked Rahab's home, sparing it from destruction just a few days later.

But what you may not know is that Rahab would go on to marry an Israelite. Their son was named Boaz. He married a woman named Ruth and their son was Obed. Obed's son was Jesse, and Jesse's youngest son was David, the forefather of Jesus Christ. Talk about what can happen when we choose trust over worry.

Falling prey to our worry is not a matter of ignoring what is wrong or of pretending that we can just make it go away on our own. It is not about passively hoping that things will somehow work out. It is not about standing in the storm, holding an umbrella, hoping that the storm will pass. As Paul next points out, we do have two other things that we can do in our battle against worry. First, in verse 8, he encourages us to fill our minds with whatever is *“true... honorable... just... pure... pleasing... commendable... worthy of praise”* – think about these things. This is a way of aligning ourselves with God. The second encouragement is to follow his example. Paul encourages the Philippians to *“Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me.”* He is encouraging them to live the faith that he himself has lived out among them and with them. He is asking them to walk the walk that he has walked.



As you consider this encouragement, think back to Paul's current situation – he is on death row, he sits in chains, his body is broken, and his earthly hope is extinguished. While none of us and certainly none of the folks in the Philippians church would wish such circumstances upon ourselves, we must draw inspiration and strength from Paul's witness to the faith. In his situation, it would have been easy to let worry win the day. Instead Paul is choosing to hold fast to a steadfast confidence in the Lord. He is choosing to stand firm upon his rock, Jesus Christ. Paul is dropping anchor right into that raging sea, holding fast to the good news of Jesus Christ.

Right now, what are the things in your life that bring you worry? I believe that we all have answers to this question. Worry is a part of life. It is not something that we can totally eradicate. It IS something that can become like the image in



the title slide. Worry can feel like a giant storm surge, sure to overwhelm and overtake us. We can feel like this man, holding an umbrella, standing still, waiting for the storm to come and surround us. Maybe that is how you feel right now. At a minimum, you've felt this way before. And you will certainly feel this way again at some point in life. In this moment, we can choose to stand there, waiting to be engulfed by worry.

Or... Or we can choose to stand upon our faith, receiving encouragement and strength from Paul's words and from his example. We can choose to kneel instead of standing. We can choose to take everything to God in prayer, trusting that God will guard our hearts and minds, believing that God will bring us a peace that passes understanding. We can choose to remember that God has been with us in the storms that raged in the past, walking with us, guiding us through. We can recall the Spirit's presence in the shipwrecks and in the suffering, in the seasons in the wilderness and in the times when our faith has brought trials as we stood counter to the culture of our world. And in it and through it all, we can choose to rejoice. We can rejoice because the promise is true: *"The God of peace will be with you."* May it be so for you and for me. Alleluia and amen.



**GPS – Grow, Pray, Study**

- 1) *Grow*. As worry creeps up on you, what faith practices have you found helpful in combating worry? What other practices might you try in the future?
- 2) *Pray*. Who do you know that seems consumed or otherwise affected by worry? How can you help them? In what ways can you pray for or with them?
- 3) *Study*. Read Matthew 19:16-30. What kept the young man from meeting Jesus' expectations? How does that contrast to the disciples' commitment?