

Challenge to Live after Paul's Example
Philippians 4:2-9
Week 6

OPENING PRAYER

Gracious Lord, your Word is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path. We need that light, not just in our time together today, but in our daily living and in the life of our hurting world. May your Holy Spirit soften our hearts that we might be open to the new things you have to say to us and the hard things you may want to reveal to us. Help us to be gracious with ourselves and one another, leaning on Jesus, who emptied himself and took the form of a servant to save us that we might grow into more faithful followers of you in Christ we pray. Amen.

Check-in question

What images, people, stories, or Scriptures come to mind when you think of the word "peace"? Where in your life have you experienced "the peace that surpasses understanding" that Paul speaks of in this chapter?

STUDY GUIDE

By Philippians 4:1, Paul begins to wrap up his letter to the Philippians. He confronts one specific case of disunity in the church, providing its members (and us) with concrete directives for dealing with conflict (Phil. 4:2–3). He then turns to a series of pithy commands (Phil. 4:4–9), which in many ways summarize and materialize several themes and ideals from earlier in the epistle.

Read Philippians 4:2-9

***This is a translation by N.T. Wright from his book, "Philippians for Everyone"**

I have a special appeal which goes jointly Euodia and Syntyche: please, please, come to a common mind in the Lord. And here's a request for you too, my loyal comrade: please help these women. They have struggled hard in the gospel alongside me, as have Clement and my other fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.

Celebrate joyfully in the Lord, all the time. I'll say it again: celebrate! Let everybody know how gentle and gracious you are. The Lord is near.

Don't worry about anything. Rather, in every area of life let God know what you want, as you pray and make requests, and give thanks as well. And God's peace, which is greater than we can ever understand, will keep guard over your hearts and minds in King Jesus.

For the rest, my dear family, these are the things you should think through: whatever is true, whatever is holy, whatever is upright, whatever is pure, whatever is attractive, whatever has a good reputation; anything virtuous, anything praiseworthy. And these are the things you should do: what you learned, received, heard and saw in and through me. And the God of peace will be with you.

Discussion Questions

1. Paul specifies the kind of joy he is calling the church to: it is “in the Lord” (Phil. 4:4). What does it mean to rejoice “in the Lord”?
2. Why do you think Paul makes such a public display of these two women – Syntyche and Euodia? Why is he so concerned for unity in the Philippian church? What is the basis of Paul’s appeal to these women? Why might it be significant that they each labored with Paul or that their names are in the book of life?
3. What does it mean to “agree in the Lord”?
4. This section draws to a close with Paul reiterating his call to follow his example and teaching (Phil. 4:9). They are to “practice these things.” What do you make of the significance of that word, “practice.”
5. Why do you think Paul is so serious about showing our “reasonableness” or “gentleness” and “being anxious for nothing”? Why would he mention this in this context? (Think back to Euodia and Syntyche. Are anxious people reasonable or easy to get along with? How would disunity in the church affect their witness to the outside world? How would anxiety?)
6. How does praying bring peace? Is it because God promises to answer our every request or is it something else? Why would prayers that bring peace have to be done “with thanksgiving”? When you think about praying, why is it important to remember “the Lord is near”?
7. Try and come up with antonyms for each of these adjectives in verse 8. How does this clarify what Paul is talking about? Do any examples come to mind?
8. What sorts of things occupy your mind? How does your preoccupation with these things affect your relationships? How does it affect your joy in the Lord? How does it affect your peace or your relationship with the God of peace?
9. What about Jesus, his person or work, is most joyful to you? Share with the group. Where have you seen God at work in your life for which you are thankful?

Further Reading/Resources¹

IN THE LORD. Paul uses the phrase “in the Lord” three times in a short span. The church is to “stand firm . . . in the Lord” (Phil. 4:1), Euodia and Syntyche are to “agree in the Lord” (Phil. 4:2), and all are to “rejoice in the Lord” (Phil. 4:4). A few verses later, he writes similarly of hearts and minds being guarded “in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:7). Paul is a big fan of these “in” phrases: in him, in Christ, in the Lord, etc. With these “in” phrases, Paul is alluding to the doctrine of the believer’s “union with Christ.” This union begins with being “found *in him*, not having a righteousness of my own . . . but that which comes through faith in Christ” (Phil. 3:9). It is “in Christ” that we also receive all of God’s saving promises and benefits (see Phil. 2:1, 5). Thus, “we glory in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:3). What an important proposition!

FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION. Because every believer is “in Christ,” believers are in Christ together. Communion with Christ includes communion with others in the body of Christ (the church). Of course, this doesn’t mean that there aren’t disagreements or conflicts between Christians—even

¹ *Philippians: A 12-Week Study* © 2014 by Ryan Kelly. <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/course/knowning-bible-philippians/#week-1-overview>

mature and experienced Christians; Euodia and Syntyche had “labored side by side” with Paul (Phil. 4:3), and yet their disagreement rose to such a level that news of it reached Rome. It troubled Paul enough that he addressed them by name in a public letter to the whole church. He pleads with them to “agree in the Lord” (Phil. 4:2). In essence he is saying, Ladies, recognize what you share, recognize your identity, recognize the saving benefits in Christ (Phil. 2:1–2), and recognize them in each other. Paul isn’t naïve and he isn’t suggesting that agreement can be reached by sweeping conflict under the rug. Concerns will have to be discussed, confession eventually made, and forgiveness granted. But the relationships themselves are often complicated. Thus, Paul calls on a “true companion”—unknown to us but obviously known to Paul and the Philippians—to “help these women” get along (Phil. 4:3). This is simply the church exchanging self-interests for the “interests of others” (Phil. 2:4), and working out salvation with one another (Phil. 2:12). It is a corporate enterprise.

PEACE. The concept of peace is fundamental to Philippians 4. Not only is the word used twice (“peace of God,” Phil. 4:7; “God of peace,” Phil. 4:9), but Paul also alludes to peace with other words. Euodia and Syntyche need to pursue peace (Phil. 4:2). A gentle spirit (“reasonableness,” Phil. 4:5) is one that is inwardly and outwardly at peace. Anxiety is the absence of inner peace. Prayer is the antidote to anxiety and the path to God’s supernatural peace (Phil. 4:6–7). Peace is also a theme significant to the whole Bible. In many ways, God’s plan can be charted through this lens: peace created in the garden, lost in the fall, and restored progressively by God. God’s plan to restore peace is first seen in the promises and shadows of the Old Testament, but ultimately through the “Prince of Peace” (Isa. 9:6), Jesus, in the New Testament. In his coming, dying, and rising, and his Spirit’s drawing, the peace of Christ penetrates lives, permeates relationships, and comforts hearts. The Prince of Peace will come again to bring final judgment on the world and final salvation to his own, thereby bringing all his promises for peace to their fulfillment.

THE BOOK OF LIFE. Paul refers to his ministry partners as people “whose names are in the book of life” (Phil. 4:3). This “book of life” is mentioned several times in the book of Revelation in connection with the final judgment (Rev. 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27). Moses spoke similarly when he asked God to either forgive the Israelites or “blot me out of your book that you have written” (Ex. 32:32). So too David when he lamented God’s enemies: “Let them be blotted out of the book of the living; let them not be enrolled among the righteous” (Psa. 69:28). The imagery should be obvious. This book is the roll of God’s “elect.” It divides all humanity. Those not in this book will face terrible, eternal demise (see Rev. 20:15). But those written in it by God’s sovereign grace can rejoice even now. As Jesus told his disciples upon their return from a successful mission, “Do not rejoice . . . that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven” (Luke 10:20).

OMNIPRESENCE. When Paul writes the pithy words, “The Lord is at hand” (Phil. 4:5), he may have in mind the nearness of the Lord’s return. This is certainly something Paul has referred to before in Philippians (Phil. 1:10; 3:11, 21), and the ever-nearness of the second coming is something he spoke of elsewhere (1 Thess. 5:1). More likely, however, in Philippians 4:5, Paul has in mind the *spatial* nearness, not the *temporal* nearness, of the Lord. Theologians call this God’s “omnipresence.” God is everywhere; he sees and knows all. Of course, this reality has significant implications and massive motivating power (as is Paul’s intent in citing it in Phil. 4:5). Nothing is hidden from God’s eyes (Jer. 16:17). This is an awe-filling reality. And yet God’s omnipresence need

not conjure up only feelings of fear and threat; it is enormously comforting for those who also know of the Lord's goodness and care (see Ps. 139:1-6).

SOVEREIGNTY. Paul sees the Christian's battle against anxiety as one fought by praying (Phil. 4:6). Such an equation pivots on the sovereignty of God. We pray because he is sovereign and we are not. We lack the power to alter most difficult circumstances; we lack the wisdom to know what is best; and we lack the perspective to know best in the grand scheme of God's plan. Whether explicitly spoken as such or not, anxiety signals discontentment with God's plan, or lack of confidence in it. Fretting implies that God doesn't see, doesn't care, or can't change things. The anxious heart turns inward, rehashing problems with *self*—almost as a form of self-prayer! But in *true* prayer, burdens are brought to the One who is wise and good, and he works accordingly. And he also supernaturally comforts and guards restless hearts (Phil. 4:7).

PHILIPPI
A ROMAN COLONY KNOWN FOR PATRIOTIC NATIONALISM

SENT FROM PRISON
EPAPHRODITUS

PAUL'S LETTER TO THE PHILIPPIANS

1:1-11 OPENING PRAYER
I THANK GOD WHEN I REMEMBER YOU! (1:3)
I'M CONFIDENT THAT THE ONE WHO BEGAN A GOOD WORK IN YOU WILL COMPLETE IT. (1:6)

1:12-26 PAUL'S IMPRISONMENT
PAUL USES IT TO GET OUT!
"WHY DOES ANYONE LOVE YOU MORE?"
NOT SO! I WANT TO BE RELEASED!
PARTICIPATING IN THE STORY OF JESUS
RELEASE
START MORE JESUS COMMUNITIES
EXECUTION
"FOR ME, LIFE IS THE MESSIAH, AND SO DYING WOULD BE A GAIN." (1:21)
OR
BETTER FOR OTHERS
"YOUR LIFE AS CITIZENS SHOULD BE CONSISTENT WITH THE GOOD NEWS ABOUT THE MESSIAH." (1:27)
"CAESAR IS SAVIOR & LORD!"
"IN THE NAME OF THE LORD JESUS..."

2:6-11 THE MESSIAH POEM
ALTHOUGH HE EXISTED IN THE NATURE OF GOD, HE DID NOT REGARD HIS EQUALITY WITH GOD AS A THING TO BE EXPLOITED. RATHER, HE EMPLOYED HIMSELF, TAKING UP THE NATURE OF A SERVANT. HE WAS BORN AS A HUMAN, & RECOGNIZED AS A HUMAN. HE HUMILED HIMSELF BY BECOMING OBEIENT TO THE POINT OF DEATH, EVEN DEATH ON A CROSS.
THEREFORE, GOD HAS HIGHLY EXALTED HIM, AND GIVEN HIM THE NAME WHICH IS ABOVE EVERY NAME, SO THAT AT THE NAME OF JESUS EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, IN HEAVEN, ON EARTH, OR UNDER THE EARTH, AND EVERY TONGUE WILL CONFESS:
JESUS THE MESSIAH IS LORD! TO THE GLORY OF GOD THE FATHER!

2:19-30 TWO EXAMPLES
v19-21 TIMOTHY
LORD, PLEASE KEEP THE PHILIPPIANS SAFE.
v25-30 EPAPHRODITUS
"HE CAME CLOSE TO DEATH TO SERVE THE MESSIAH."
HE'S OKAY!
EXPRESSES PAUL'S CONVICTION OF WHO JESUS IS...
...OFFERS AN EXAMPLE to follow

3:1-11
ZEALOUS & SELF-RIGHTEOUS
"I RE..."
IN A KNOW..."
PAUL'S PAST
(SEE GALATIANS)

QUOTING ISAIAH 45:23
PAUL'S POINTS
the One True God
& the LORD JESUS

A UNIQUE WIN...
• HE SAW HIS...
• HIS AWARENESS OF JESUS...
• KNOWING JESUS...