

The Letter of Paul to the Philippians

Chapter 4

Verses 1-9—Exhortation, Encouragement, and Prayer

v.1 - *my joy and crown*. The Philippians' spiritual success would be Paul's "crowning achievement," and their perseverance and final salvation will bring him great joy. ~ *ESV Study Bible*

The apostle Paul writes to the Christians at Philippi with advice on how they can "stand firm" in the Lord. The word used is the same as that for a soldier standing fast in the shock of battle with the enemy surging down upon him, or a combatant in a Roman amphitheater fighting for his life. ~ *Nicky Gumbel*

v.3 Paul is especially eager to see Euodia and Syntyche reconciled because they have labored side by side with him in the gospel. Paul did not isolate himself and minister alone; he deliberately worked with many others. ~ *ESV Study Bible*

We need to watch carefully our relationships with other Christians. While disagreements, disunity, and unforgiveness can weaken the church and destroy our faith, the warmth of close Christian friendships strengthens the church, builds our faith, and is one of the vital secrets of standing firm in the Lord. ~ *Nicky Gumbel*

"Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity! It is like the precious oil on the head, running down on the beard, on the beard of Aaron, running down on the collar of his robes! It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion! For there the LORD has commanded the blessing, life forevermore." ~ *Psalms 133*

There can be no unity unless it is in Christ. In ordinary human affairs it repeatedly happens that the most diverse people are held together because they all give allegiance to a great leader. Their loyalty to each other depends entirely on their loyalty to him. Take the leader away, and the whole group would disintegrate into isolated and often warring units. Men can never really love each other until they love Christ. The brotherhood of man is impossible without the lordship of Christ. ~ *William Barclay*

v.4 The joy that Paul calls for is not a happiness that depends on circumstances but a deep contentment that is in the Lord, based on trust in the sovereign, living God, and that therefore is available always, even in difficult times. ~ *ESV Study Bible*

Sixteen times Paul urges the Christians at Philippi to rejoice. Here he says it twice: "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" Paul never denies the problems, but he does encourage the Philippians to rejoice in the midst of difficulties.

However bad our circumstances might be, there is one thing we can always rejoice about: the Lord, His love, His mercy, his promises, and His presence. ~ Nicky Gumbel

It is the simple fact of human experience that a man living in the lap of luxury can be wretched and a man in the depths of poverty can overflow with joy. ~ William Barclay

v.5 Reasonableness is crucial for maintaining community; it is the disposition that seeks what is best for everyone and not just for oneself. ~ *ESV Study Bible*

vv.6-7 Paul echoes Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount that believers are not to be anxious but are to entrust themselves into the hands of their loving heavenly Father, whose peace will guard them in Christ Jesus. Because God is sovereign and in control, Christians can entrust all their difficulties to him, who rules over all creation and who is wise and loving in all his ways. An attitude of thanksgiving contributes directly to this inward peace. ~ *ESV Study Bible*

“Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, 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 of the field, which saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. “Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble. ~ *Matthew 6.25-34*

Prayer and worry are not easy bedfellows. They are like fire and water. A sign outside a church reads: “Why pray when you can worry and take tranquilizers?” As we bring our worries and anxieties to God in prayer and leave them with Him, He gives us His peace in exchange. The word for peace means far more than an absence of hostility. It means wholeness, soundness, well-being, oneness with God, every kind of blessing and good. ~ Nicky Gumbel

Paul insists that we must give thanks *in everything*, in sorrows and in joys alike. That implies two things. It implies *gratitude* and also *perfect submission* to the will of God. ~ William Barclay

v.8 The Philippians are to fill their minds with things that will inspire worship of God and service to others. ~ *ESV Study Bible*

There is a saying: “Sow a thought, reap an action, sow an action, reap a habit, sow a habit, reap a character, sow a character, reap a destiny.” Paul urges us to set our minds on the right things.... It is hard to think like that.... However, as Martin Luther said, you can’t stop a bird flying overhead, but you can stop it nesting in your hair.... Sir Thomas More said, “Occupy your minds with good thoughts, or the enemy will fill them with bad ones: unoccupied they cannot be.”

We need to fill our minds with good thoughts from the moment we wake up. There is no better way of doing this than by beginning the day with Bible reading, worship and prayer—to set the agenda right for the day. Our unseen life is like the roots of a tree or the foundation of a house, and our ability to withstand the storms of life depends on the strength of the unseen parts. ~ *Nicky Gumbel*

v.9 Beyond having a proper spiritual outlook, the Philippians are to practice what they have seen Paul doing. As they make progress in this way, they will find that it is not simply the peace of God but the God of peace himself who will be with them. ~ *ESV Study Bible*

The writer of Hebrews puts before his readers the example of the great men and women of God (Hebrews 11).... I have found in my own life that the lives of Christian friends have been a great influence on me. In some cases it has been their family life that has been the model; in others their prayer life, their love, their way of handling others, or their faith. ~ *Nicky Gumbel*

Verses 10-20—God’s Provision

The secret of living amid life’s difficulties is simple; trusting God in such a way that one can say, “I can do all things through him who strengthens me.” This does not mean God will bless whatever a person does; it must be read within the context of the letter, with its emphasis on obedience to God and service to God and others.

The Philippians share in Paul’s ministry, not just at the spiritual level but at the practical level of financial support. Those who are generous toward God will find that He is generous toward them and will supply their every need...in Christ Jesus.

~ *ESV Study Bible*

The Stoics rightly believed that contentment did not consist in possessing much but in wanting little, “If you want to make a man happy,” they said, “add not to his possessions, but take away from his desires.” Socrates was once asked who was the wealthiest man. He answered: He who is content with least.” ~ *William Barclay*

John D. Rockefeller, who founded the Standard Oil Company and made hundreds of millions of dollars, was once asked, “How much money does it take to make a man

happy?” He answered, “Just a little bit more than he has.” ...Benjamin Franklin once said, “Content makes poor men rich; discontent makes rich men poor”

Putting it into commercial terms, Paul explains that giving is an investment of capital. Elsewhere he uses the picture of a farmer sowing seed: “Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously” (2 Corinthians 9.6). Giving is planting seed. A farmer who sows is investing for the future, for he knows that he will reap far more than he has sown. This spiritual principle applies to everything in life. Whatever we give to the Lord, He multiplies, whether it is our time, gifts, ambitions, or money. The return on our investment is not necessarily financial; rather, we are investing in people. We see lives changed, people coming into the kingdom of God, the hungry being fed, the naked clothed, drug addicts set free, marriages restored, and the sick healed. The New Testament principle is that if we want treasure in heaven, we have to send it on in advance.

~ Nicky Gumbel

Verses 21-23—Final Greetings

Paul sends special greetings from the Christian brothers who are of Caesar’s household. It does not mean those who are of Caesar’s kith and kin. Caesar’s household was the regular phrase for what we would call the Imperial Civil Service; it had members all over the world. The palace officials, the secretaries, the people who had charge of the imperial revenues, those who were responsible for the day-to-day administration of the empire, all these were Caesar’s household.... It was to be another three hundred years before Christianity became the religion of the empire, but already the first signs of the ultimate triumph of Christ were to be seen.

~ William Barclay

It is no coincidence that the letter to the Philippians begins and ends with grace (Phil 1.2; 4.23)... The central theme of the letter is the central theme of the New Testament and the Bible as a whole: God’s love and generosity.

~ Nicky Gumbel