

Philippians 4:1-9

From Anxiety To Assurance

Good Morning, Church....

And almost Merry Christmas...

I hope to see you this Wednesday Night for our Christmas Eve Service.

It is so wonderful to be here with you all.

Here at Calvary Old Town, we are currently in a verse-by-verse study of the Book of Philippians...

We will be looking at the first 9 verses of Chapter 4 today if you want to make your way there in your Bibles.

Personally, I want to say, I am glad you are here with us today.

The text we are in is a very important portion of Scripture.

If you are new to the Lord, or it is your first time through the Book of Philippians, this is a portion of the Bible you will need to remember and return to throughout your walk with the Lord.

I recite it at times, when I am in my darkest moments, and I am grateful that the Spirit inspired Paul's pen to write these things down.

For those of you who have been walking with the Lord for some time, I imagine your Bible is highlighted, underlined, and noted, with dates and heavy markings throughout this section.

There are a few things to consider, however, before we get to the sweet promises given and the critical instruction, so **let's pray... and we get into it...**

Do you have anxiety that peaks every night?

Maybe during the day, you can manage – work, family, all your responsibilities keep you moving...

But as soon as the house goes silent, your thoughts boom like a big bass drum in your mind.

You lie in bed, replaying the conversations you had, thinking about the finances that are about to swallow your life, and about whether you are ruining your kids and your uncertain future.

There on your pillow, the room is dark, but your mind is wide awake... sleepless night after sleepless night... what is a person to do?

Throughout the week, I go to my gym, and the security guard there, "D," is very friendly.

He always smiles when you come in, talks to the people, and keeps the staff there happy and secure.

I notice that his presence in the gym significantly improves the overall environment.

No one is anxious or worried; we don't have to be on edge or unnerved.

I am never worried, even about protecting myself...

I can size a guy up, and he is a pretty formidable man.

I know he can handle business, and his job is to do so if needed.

It gives everyone peace of mind... that image stuck with me last week as I consider our text...

As I read Paul's words...

"The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."

Paul is not promising that we as Christians won't have reasons to worry.

In fact, he writes this letter from prison.

But he does promise that when we bring everything to God in prayer – with thanksgiving – God's peace takes up position like a guard in our lives.

It is not a peace that explains everything for us.

It is not a peace that removes every problem from our lives.

But a peace that stands watch over the heart and mind of the believer.

So, when we are in those sleepless nights, we can pray differently, not asking God to fix everything for us immediately.

We can hand over the responsibility for guarding our hearts and minds to Him.

While our circumstances might not change, something else might; we might actually sleep, because we feel safe, knowing that our hearts are being guarded.

Paul's message this morning in Philippians 4 will be clear... anxiety thrives when we try to be our own security. Assurance grows when we entrust ourselves to the Lord.

That is the journey Paul calls us to – from anxiety to assurance.

It is important to remember that the central theme of this letter is Joy.

As Paul sits in this Roman prison cell, thinking about the believers in Philippi, he is encouraged by them and flooded with the Joy of the Lord.

And he points them to this same discovery repeatedly in their own lives.

So, as we read this letter as God's Word today, we, too, are encouraged in our own walk to discover what it means to live in this same Joy.

Chapter 4 will provide practical instructions on how to do this as Christians.

Perhaps you have struggled to find joy or a reason to rejoice in your own life.

Well, listen up, stay tuned, because God's Word can be life-changing for you today.

I hope that all of us can leave today being changed by God's Word... especially here as we come into this Christmas Season... many of us need hope and joy right now...

May the Lord teach us this Truth...

Look at verse 1 with me here...

Be Anxious for Nothing; Think These Thoughts

4:1 Therefore, my beloved and longed-for brethren, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, beloved.

Paul turns the readers attention to what he previously mentioned: our citizenship in heaven and the transforming power of our Lord.

But look how he now connects his own personal affection for these young believers... “My beloved and longed for brethren, my joy and crown...”

When he thought of the work taking place in the young church in Philippi, Joy came to his heart, especially as he considered his relationship with the believers there.

Paul loved them, and they loved him.

As a result, he can provide them with counsel and advice he believes will be heard and received.

“Stand fast!”

I imagine that, in your journey, as I have experienced in my own, there come times when you want to give up in your Christian walk.

Maybe the trials are just too much, too weighty, or coming at you too rapidly.

Or there is frustration with ourselves, or we believe we have this inability to get it right when it matters most.

Paul says here... if you are a Christian, stand fast, stand firm, hang in there... You will make it...

You are a citizen of heaven; this is not your home.

You have the Joy of the Lord as your Strength...

No matter what battle you are in this morning, no matter what the enemy or the world is throwing at you today, stand firm in the Lord and His Promises in His Word.

He has a purpose for your Life... Man, that is so good to be reminded of this morning.

It is great that, when Paul addresses instructions, commands, or even discipline, he often seasons them with words of Grace and Comfort for the believer.

He really is a great communicator in this aspect.

One observation I make here is that when a brutal truth needs to be said, it should be given with a word of encouragement.

God's Word does this all through its pages.

We are told in...

Heb. 4:12 For the word of God *is* living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

The Word of God cuts both ways; it has the power to build us up, but it can also cut and correct our lives when we are out of line or in rebellion.

And Paul says here, "stand firm... a word of instruction and encouragement...."

But he will swing the other direction next. There were those in Philippi who needed to be corrected...

Look now at verses 2 and 3...

Be United, Joyful, and in Prayer

2 I implore Euodia and I implore Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. **3** And I urge you also, true companion, help these women who labored with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names *are* in the Book of Life.

This is impressive to consider.

I don't know if you have ever considered this, but sometimes, in the Church, problems can arise between people.

Here, some issues that are not given in the text, have risen between two women.

I mean, who would have ever thought that this could happen, among Christian women!

Euodia and Syntyche, this is the only place you get their honorable mention in God's Word.

Can you imagine this? Having the boast of forever having your name written in God's Holy Word.

Then someone asks you, "Oh yeah, that is amazing, what did your name get recorded for?"

"Oh, that is not important..." "But it is in there."

"No, tell me... that is amazing, I can't wait to tell someone, I met you, someone whose name is in the Bible!"

"Well, you see, this one lady, Euodia, she was just so hard to get along with in Church, always butting in my business, I could never prove it, but I think she was gossiping about me, so I gossiped about her with some people, then I went to the leadership about her, because she just was no good for the Church."

“So, yeah, Euodia and I, we just don’t get along, and I have my Bible study prayer group that I meet with, and we don’t gossip, we pray for the other group.”

“My name is Syntyche, though, you will find my name in Philippians Chapter 4, but I am the good one in the problem, I assure you, I would never gossip.”

It is obvious here that both women were Christians in the Church in Philippi, fellow servants of Paul, and that they influenced others in the Church.

Understand, there was only one Church in Philippi, and you have to imagine, as the Church excitedly all sat to hear Paul’s letter read to them... Euodia and Syntyche are sitting there with their little factions...

And they are just called out by name... can you imagine being called out by name today... the offense that would cause...

But today... people would move on to another Church...

They did not have that option at the time, so they had to work through it.

And Paul knew that whatever these two women were going through... He had wisdom enough to know that our enemy could take their petty issues, their differences, their hurt feelings, just the issues of these two women, Paul knew that it was enough...

It could wreck everything that God was doing in Philippi.

All the good, the Joy, the lives being changed by the Gospel, all of it was in jeopardy by these two women and their petty issue, and it was that serious...

Don't ever think your grumblings in someone's ear is a little thing... don't ever think your complaints about the Church are that big of a deal... the gossip that is spread under the guise of spiritual overtones... nope, all of that is straight from hell's munition depot...

You are playing into our enemies' strategy of tearing down the Kingdom of God. For the Devil, that strategy is more effective against the Church than a

powerful tyrant coming against the Church with a mighty army threatening to destroy us with terrifying weapons of chaos and mayhem.

May we never think little of these things, and allow our petty differences to cause division among the work taking place here in Victorville.

Most of the things we allow ourselves to get worked up over as Christians in the United States are very minimal in the scope of eternity.

There are real, huge things to make a stand on, to be immovable on for our faith... rarely are those things considered in our culture.

Most of the time... simply dying to self can resolve the issue...

Look at the instruction Paul gives these ladies...

Agree in the Lord... take on the mind of Christ... He died to Himself...

Dead people have no rights... or feelings... they cannot hurt....

If you are dead... You cannot say, "That is not fair..."

Take on the mind of Christ... who lived for others...
make it about others...

These poor ladies will be remembered forever for
their fight...

They could have been like the other women in verse
3, and Clement, who labored with Paul in the Gospel;
they were faithful companions...

That is a better record...

Whose names are written in the Book of Life...

The reality is, we do need to look ahead, Church...
This life is not it... We will all give an account one
day... the Books will be open...

Will you be remembered for your contentious time in
the Body of Christ...

As you give an account... You were the one always
fighting... in every ministry... You did not like to
listen... You did your own thing...

You were always offended... by how people mistreated you... or by what they did not do for you...

Were you submissive or rebellious?

Will you be known for gossip and slander and whispering little doubts and seeds of bitterness in people's hearts?

Or when the Books are open, and the account is given, will you be known as a faithful servant, a true companion, one who labored well, with integrity, sacrificially, and with character?

You protected the weak and looked out for those, who others who tried to manipulate?

The reality is, the enemy is cunning and working craftily, and we need to be wise to his tactics at all times...

He will try to distract you from the things that matter most, the eternal things, so that you get caught up in the small stuff, bickering about the small things, things that are temporary and meaningless really.

So, we need to move on, lots of good teaching in the verses ahead... after the discipline, Paul encourages them once again, verse 4...

4 Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!

Every time I read this verse, I am reminded of a worship song from my childhood...

We would sing this verse repeatedly.

And the ladies would sing part of it, then the men, and over and over again...

As the Apostle begins to bring his thoughts to a close, he brings in this remarkable statement that really sums up all of his instruction from this letter.

Notice our Joy is in the Lord, and the Joy of the Lord is our strength.

He says here, Rejoice in the Lord... sometimes? Only when things are up? Good? Going my way? I get a raise? I found some good News.

Always!

Think about all that Paul has already stated in this letter to the Christians...

- God is faithful to complete what He has begun in us. So we can rejoice!
- He is faithful to sustain us during our trials in life, and He will use our trials for His Glory... This makes rejoicing in Him Possible.
- While we live in this life, we live for Christ, but even in death, it is gain... and we can rejoice in that.
- He has equipped us to walk in Truth so we can rejoice in the Lord.
- We have the Power of His resurrection at work in our Lives... this gives us hope and Joy.
- We can look up and press on, which gives us the ultimate reason to rejoice in all things.
- This allows us to stand firm because our home, our citizenship, is in heaven... Church, there is much to celebrate this morning.

Knowing all that Paul has written so far, he tells the reader to rejoice in the Lord always, and he doubles

down, “If you did not hear me the first time, again, I will say rejoice!”

Maybe you are sitting here thinking that is pretty presumptuous of you, Pastor Gary...

“You have no idea what is going on in my life!”

“I received the worst news in my life this week, and you want me to rejoice.”

“Pastor, did you know my cancer came back for the third time?”

“Do you know about the letter I received this week, threatening to sue me for something I did not even do, Pastor?”

“I might lose everything, Pastor!”

“Do you know I caught my husband cheating on me with my best friend?”

“Pastor, I am going to spend this Christmas alone!”

“There you are on your high horse, telling me to rejoice in the Lord always, and you don’t even know my situation, pastor...”

First, I want to be clear: we teach verse by verse... the Bible is telling you this today... The Pastor is only relaying the message.

I am not telling you this casually; I hope that is not what you are thinking. If you are, I am sorry...

Your pastor, the pastor up here, needs to hear these things to...

But the truth is, this is what is expected. Understand what Paul is saying: he is not telling you to look at those terrible circumstances in your life and asking you to jump up and down and rejoice.

No, you can celebrate, I mean, we can celebrate our relationship with the Living God and what it means for our lives... no matter what we are facing...

Why would Paul write Rejoice in the Lord always? Knowing that sometimes we go through hell, sometimes here in this life?

Sometimes really terrible things happen to really good people, and things do seem unfair and unbalanced.

But when we look to our God, we can always find a reason to rejoice in Him.

We can look at Paul's own situation here: in prison, writing this letter, not knowing what lay ahead for himself, but he could focus on the Lord and tell them, "Rejoice in Him."

He could point to Jesus and say, "Look at Him, rejoice in Him always..."

It has nothing to do with our circumstances, but all to do with focusing on Jesus and His promises for us...

We can rejoice in the Lord, because the Word tells us...

Heb. 13:8

Jesus Christ *is* the same yesterday, today, and forever.

I don't know about you, but I am so grateful that our God does not change...

In a world that is ever-changing, with people who are constantly letting us down, lying, and disappointing, it is so wonderful that we can look to and put our hope in Jesus, who does not change with our circumstances.

Albert Barnes says, “If everything else changes, yet the Lord does not change; if the sources of all other joy are dried up, yet He is not; and there is not a moment of a Christian's life in which he may not find joy in the character, law, and promises of God. – Rejoice Always!”¹

Think about this a little further, maybe this is why James could write this in his famous verse,

¹ <https://www.bibleportal.com/verse-topic?v=philippians+4:4-8&version=KJV>

James 1:2 My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials,

Yes, we can have Joy and even rejoice in the Lord when Trials come our way, even when it seems like our world is crumbling all around us.

How we face things as Christians makes all the difference in the world... our attitude matters...

Listen, we can focus on all the negative things happening around us, and we will be miserable, and the people around us will be unhappy as well.

Or we can choose to focus on our God and rejoice in Him.

He is stable, never changing, forever showering us with His Love, Mercy, and Grace.

So, even when our lives seem to be falling apart and things are going horribly wrong, we can rejoice in the Lord.

Look what Paul says now in verse 5... as Paul slips in a bit of advice here...

5 Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand.

Gentleness... as a man... this is something I do not have naturally...

My wife always calls me Fernand the Bull. If you have ever seen that cartoon movie, he is a giant bull who ends up in a China Shop, and, well, it ends up the way you would think it does, with broken glass everywhere.

And I am everything but gentle, I am a man, I hold hammers, and tools, and heavy things... don't put soft, delicate, breakable things in these hands!

But I digress... Paul says... let your gentleness be known to all men... the Lord is at hand...

The Greek word conveys a stronger sense of patience and forbearance... Ahh, as a man, I can be yielding in my spirit...

This is how Jesus was... He was a carpenter too. He was a Man... He was not gentle physically... but His spirit was meek...

This is much different from what culture is trying to make men out to be today...

We live in a day where women are women and men are too...

But Paul is speaking about the way we treat each other...

Like Jesus... not weak... but meek... There is a significant difference: meekness has strength, but it is strength under control.

I have been around carpenters my whole life... never once did I see a soft man framing anything... some weak men would show up for a day or two... but they could not hang...

I have seen huge bodybuilders show up for that type of work... talking like the Giant from Gath... like those big muscles were going to carry them all day through

the hot sun through that blistering back-breaking work...

And by lunchtime, those big men were in the shade, quitting to the supervisors...

Jesus was no soft Man at all, being a carpenter...

But who He was as He ministered to others... that was different...

He would give this invitation in...

Matt 11:28-30 Come to Me, all *you* who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. **29** Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. **30** For *My yoke is easy and My burden is light.*"

So, we are to let our gentleness be known to all men...

This does not mean we are to change who God made us as men... I know that, physically, it is difficult for me to be gentle...

My daughters, when they were babies... goodness, that was the biggest test of my life... holding those little angels in my arms... the boys... I cannot tell you how many times I accidentally bashed their heads on the wall... their boys... they didn't even cry... but the girls were the biggest test of my gentleness skills...

I remember falling down the stairs with 2-month-old Sofia in my arms... and just taking the brunt of every bit of that fall so my newborn would not feel a thing and she would be okay...

And we got to the bottom... I am sure I have a broken back and butt and bunch of other stuff... and there she is just smiling at me...

I knew... right then... I could never be physically gentle enough... I am not built that way...

But patience, in the context Paul has it here... over the last thirteen years with that little girl... my gentleness, patience, and forbearance have been tested to the Max!

We are to let our patience be known to all men... the Lord's return is at hand... and He gives us thirteen-year-old daughters to exhibit that kind of gentleness to the world...

Church, look what Paul writes next... this is incredible...

This is probably one of the most recited verses in my life... memorize it if you have not already...

Verse 6...

6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; **7** and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

If I just told you today, "Hey, don't be anxious..."

That would probably annoy you.

I know when Jess is just stressed out, kids are driving her up the wall, things are high intensity in the house...

I think I am doing something noble by saying, "Honey, it is going to be okay."

But the daggers coming back at me in her eyes tell me that I have just done something dangerously wrong, maybe inconsiderate... I mean, I am calm... I am just trying to rub my calm off on her, but it always backfires on me.

Paul has a little better approach, I think...

He has just written the key to being anxiety-free... rejoicing in the Lord...

You see, keeping our focus and our understanding on the Lord makes all the difference.

When we choose to rejoice rather than worry, we can deal with the troubles of this life more effectively.

It probably isn't a good or healthy approach to be fake about this, either...

We can be anxiety-free, rejoicing in the Lord, even as we go through complex and difficult times...

But the key is to rejoice in the Lord without pretending we enjoy going through the trial.

Talking about framing reminded me of something: I used to like swinging a 32-oz hammer.

For many reasons, it was the heaviest hammer they made, so I could run my mouth all day about how my hammer was bigger.

But I had practical reasons... I am impatient... maybe you know that about me... and a heavier hammer got the nail in faster... plus... I liked being the guy called in when something needed to be moved, like a big beam... the 32oz hammer guy will get it...

But the downside to it all is when that big ol' hammer made contact with my thumb, because sometimes you had a weird angle or something, and you missed your target... but that hammer would pop the tip of my thumb like a cherry tomato.

And I didn't ever work Union, so, if I stopped working, I didn't get paid, so, I would stop the bleeding with some sawdust or something, and get back to work...

But all day long, I would be reaching for nails in my bags, and they would be poking in that raw, open sore...

I'm not sure where I am going with this illustration...

I want sympathy on this one...

No, I remember... I am swinging that hammer, and I strike my thumb... I am not going to praise God... I am going to say, "Darn it." Or whatever else Christians are allowed to tell when something like that happens.

Now, even though I am not praising God for hitting my thumb, I can still praise God, even though my thumb was hit. They are two separate things.

He is still God while my thumb is throbbing in pain... while I am going through the trial... I am not rejoicing in the pain... I am rejoicing in God... God is still at work in my life, regardless of the pain in my life...

If I know He is still God, then I can come to Him in prayer in confidence...

If I think God let me down because my thumb hurts... and I start focusing on my pain... and the problem... I started saying, "Well, God, why did You allow this to happen to me?"

Then I am allowing the pain to dictate my life's focus and not God.

I am not coming to God in faith at that point.

But if I look to God, past the pain, separate from the pain, above the pain, then there is always a reason to rejoice.

Whatever the situation it is, physical pain, emotional pain, any pain, maybe someone close to you has died, and I know that first year seems unbearable...

Now, if you can look to God, understand who He is apart from that pain, into the full majesty of who He is, realizing He is sovereign and a Good God, and He does not make mistakes...

Then your focus shifts from the pain... from the difficulty of it all... and we can come to Him in prayer in supplication, with thanksgiving, because we are seeing Him clearly now...

These two aspects Paul mentions here of prayer are similar, but somewhat distinct...

Prayer is the broader term that encompasses all our communication with God.

Supplication is the direct asking of God to do something.

Instead of being anxious and nervous about life's issues, we can invest that energy into prayer...

We are an anxious generation...

How many things should we be praying in... I know we pray when the big stuff comes...

But in everything... small things too.

When you don't know what to pray... I know personally... I go immediately to the Thanksgiving...

And I think I could never stop praying in the thanksgiving... the list is endless there...

When we truly rejoice in the Lord always, and we come to Him in prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, we are promised peace...

Consider my friend "D," who stands guard outside our gym...

The peace of God will guard your heart and mind, and Peace that surpasses all understanding... beyond our ability to understand and to explain... it can only be experienced.

And this will guard your heart and mind in Christ Jesus... it is a military word... Peace will be on guard over your heart and mind...

So let's close with this... This is my life verse... not because I live it out... but because I want to live it out... I need to live it out...

I try to include it on every card I sign and in many of my emails; it is a verse that can be life-changing if put into practice.

Meditate on These Things

8 Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things *are* noble, whatever things *are* just, whatever things *are* pure, whatever things *are* lovely, whatever things *are* of good report, if *there is* any virtue and if *there is* anything praiseworthy — meditate on these things. **9** The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.

Here is Paul's second, finally, as he winds down and brings this teaching to a close.

It is clear that what we choose to focus on and what we meditate on will make a significant difference in our lives.

No one else can determine what we set our minds upon.

It is up to us to choose what to focus on.

We can choose to focus on mind-numbing nothingness... on those screens...

Anxiety-creating screens – if time

Or we can fix our minds on truth.

You can fix your mind on things that will edify your life, or on nothing that will benefit your spiritual life.

You can fix your heart on gossip and slander... on conspiracies and podcasts... on news and wars...

Or you can meditate on those things that are true, noble, just, pure, lovely, of a good report, anything that has virtue or is praiseworthy.... You can meditate on those things...

I imagine... as you do... You will quickly move from anxiety to assurance Church...

We change our focus by filling our mind with God's Word...

Then Paul ends this section with this powerful statement, “the things you have learned, received, heard, and seen in me, these do.”

Paul says he taught them not only in word but in deed.

Paul lived out what he taught... and for me, that makes all the difference in who I will receive from.

This morning, maybe you may have come in a little discouraged, feeling overwhelmed...

This message was for you. Jesus brought you here to encourage you in your journey with Him.

Be reminded that He is faithful and worthy of praise, even if the chips seem down.

Rejoice in the Lord always... focus on Him... not your circumstance.

And whatever things are true, noble, just, pure, or praiseworthy... meditate... focus on those things...

Don't forget to bring everything to the Lord in prayer and supplication with thanksgiving... so He can set up that supernatural guard of peace around your heart and mind.

Let's pray...