

Week 9: The Harmonious Life *Philippians 4:1-9*

Hook



Main Point: We advance the Gospel by unity, rejoicing in all things, giving our worries to God, dwelling on the things of God, and reflecting reasonableness to the world.

Put the following list of health conditions on the board or in a handout for the class. Ask the group to review the items and to determine which of these are negatively influenced by worry.

panic attacks, asthma, obesity, headaches, muscle tension, central nervous system function, increased risk for respiratory illnesses, excretory and digestive system upset, gastrointestinal problems, immune system response, cardiovascular issues like rapid heart rate, palpitations, shrinking brain mass, lowering your IQ, chest pain, high blood pressure, heart disease, heart attack, premature aging, behavior changes, and generalized ill health – sleep problems, fatigue and bouts of unexplained physical ailments. It can also lead to clinical depression, anxiety, marriage problems, family dysfunction, substance abuse, and even dementia, accelerated aging, Alzheimer's disease, premature death

It's a trick question. Worry contributes to all of these conditions. Basically, worry is really, really, really bad for your body. It can literally kill you.ⁱ Which is cause for concern as our world is becoming more and more anxious by the year. Anxiety is the most common mental illness in the United States, affecting 18 percent of our population.ⁱⁱ And The American Psychiatric Association has discovered that in the last few years, anxiety has risen; 40 percent of people say

they are more anxious than they were a year ago, particularly when it comes to health, safety and finances.ⁱⁱⁱ

What kinds of things do you worry about?

Do you wish you wouldn't worry? If so, how do you think you can stop worrying?

This exercise taught us the physical effects of worry to your body. What do you think are the spiritual effects?

Week 9, Philippians 4:1-9

Book

Main Point: We advance the Gospel by unity, rejoicing in all things, giving our worries to God, dwelling on the things of God, and reflecting reasonableness to the world.

Text Summary: This section begins the last chapter of the letter to the Philippians and therefore, Paul's concluding exhortations to them. So, this passage is more of a series of several points rather than one cohesive thought. Paul gave them several exhortations, all shaped by the situation in Philippi:

1. vv. 2-3: he urged two particular women to be reconciled
2. vv. 4-5: he urged them to rejoice in the Lord, show reasonableness to the world
3. vv. 6-7: he urged them to give their worries to God in prayer and be thankful
4. vv. 8-9: he urged them to dwell on the things of God

They are various points, but they also are connected. Points 1, 3, and 4 all point to *how* they can accomplish point 2. If they live in this way—being unified with one another, giving their worries to God, dwelling on the things of God—they will not only be able to rejoice in the Lord and be at peace for themselves; they will also be a shining example to the world of the joy and peace of Christ, which is the very definition of the kingdom of God (Romans 14:17). So, the Philippians can advance the Gospel through their example of reasonableness, peace and joy to the world.

Philippians 4:1 [Read]

Look at the way Paul speaks to the Philippians, the words and phrases he used. What does this say about the way he feels about them?

What does it mean that they are his "joy and crown"?

Why does he feel the need to encourage them to stand firm?

Paul begins this chapter with "therefore." This is how we know these are his concluding thoughts. Because of all that he has said so far in this letter, now therefore, the Philippians can stand firm. Because Christ uses their suffering for good, because to live is Christ and to die is gain. Because Christ came in humility. Because they have righteousness through Christ and

Christ alone. Because Christ gives them the strength to press on. Because of Christ, they can stand firm.

Paul used the phrase “stand firm” three times in Ephesians, when he talked about the armor of God (Ephesians 6:10-18). It’s a military term; they are fighting a spiritual battle with the “the spiritual *forces* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*” (Ephesians 6:12). Paul had used the same phrase in chapter 1 of Philippians about their fear of their opponents (1:27). It’s a sense of standing firm in the face of danger—not retreating, not backing down, not being afraid, but standing firm, confident in the Lord and His grace and His power. No matter what comes against you, how big the enemy. It is the same thing God told His people in the Old Testament, at the Red Sea, when Pharaoh’s army was approaching and they were “in great fear”: *The Lord will fight for you. And you only have to be still* (Exodus 14:14).

The Philippians can stand firm because of Christ’s strength. Because He is the One fighting for them. They can be strong “*in the Lord and in the strength of His might*” (Ephesians 6:10). Not their own strength, not their own power, but the Lord’s. This is what he is encouraging them, imploring them to do in general—to stand firm. And each section that follows is a different way to stand firm.

As he did at the beginning of his letter, Paul spoke to them with intimacy and love. He called them “brothers” and those whom he “loves and longs for.” His “joy and crown.” His “beloved” (4:1). This word “to long for” only occurs here in the New Testament, but has been likened to homesickness, which is consistent with how he talked about them in chapter 1, when he said he yearned for them (1:8) and in chapter 2 when he said he hoped to come to them himself soon (2:24).

He continues his theme of joy and rejoicing that runs throughout the whole letter by calling them his joy. He pairs joy with crown, which conjures up the end-time imagery from 3:14—the crown that Paul will receive when he finishes his race. They, and his other churches, are his life’s work, his ministry, his crown. He uses the same concept when writing to the Thessalonians – What is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? For you are our glory and joy” (1 Thessalonians 2:19-20).^{iv}

Paul is couching his exhortations in his love for them, in his intimate relationship with them. He can exhort them in this way because he has earned the right to be heard in their lives. He is their spiritual father, who loves them dearly, who prays for them daily, who rejoices in their faithfulness.

What spiritual battles are you up against? What enemies are you afraid of?

How can you stand firm in the Lord, in the strength of His might?

How can we encourage each other to stand firm?

How can we hold each other up?

Philippians 4:2-3 [Read]

Sub-Point 1: Seek unity among all believers, both as a group and in individual relationships.

What does “agree in the Lord” mean?

Can two believers who strongly disagree about something still work together to advance the Gospel? Why or why not?

Paul has spent a lot of time in the book of Philippians so far talking about unity in the body of Christ (1:27-30; 2:1-3; 2:14). The Church should be unified in all things so they can be more effective in advancing the Gospel. A kingdom divided against itself will not stand (Mark 3:24). Here, Paul applied that broad imperative to a particular situation that was happening in Philippi.

First he entreated two women to “agree in the Lord” (4:2). Unfortunately, no further information is known about these women. These verses tell us they were well-known Greek women and central to the Philippian church. They had been coworkers with Paul in the Gospel, working side by side with him and other leaders in the past. He said their names were written in the Book of Life, a reference back to that heavenly citizenship from earlier in the letter (1:27). These were mature believers, leaders in the church, who had had some sort of disagreement.

Paul did not take sides on the disagreement, but simply called them to unity. It was most likely not a significant theological issue where one person was in error, or Paul would have been compelled to correct that, as he did in other letters.^v He doesn’t even name the disagreement. He doesn’t tell one of the two to give in to the other side. He doesn’t tell them to compromise. He tells them to “agree in the Lord.” To come to an agreement. To be unified. Not just agree, but agree “in the Lord.” (4:2).

To seek the Lord. To pray together until they reached an agreement. To ask the Holy Spirit to intervene. As we said in week 4, if we want to pursue unity in our Church, we need to pursue God together. If there is a conflict in the Church, between two people or 20, the first thing we should ask is, “Have you prayed about it together?” These women could not just agree to disagree; they could not just go their separate ways. They were leaders at the same church, they had to work together (4:3). They had to come to an agreement.

We learned in chapter 2 that the key to unity is humility, seeking the good of the other first (2:3). For some of us, especially in conflict or disagreement, this may feel like weakness or losing or giving in. But when Christ humbled Himself, it wasn't weakness. It was strength. When it looked as though He were losing on the Cross, He was actually winning. He humbled Himself and God lifted Him up. To choose to be humble takes great strength. To continue to be prideful and demand your own way is the easy way. To choose to put others first is the difficult path. It takes supernatural strength. It is really only possible through the Holy Spirit.

Paul also encouraged his "true companion" to help them agree in the Lord. We are not sure who this true companion was. Perhaps Timothy, whom Paul was sending to Philippi. Perhaps Luke, who some scholars believe was working there as their leader, though he is never mentioned by name. There are many theories about who this "true companion" was, none of which are conclusive.^{vi} This true companion may have prayed with them, discussed the issue, mediated between their two views. We don't exactly know the process, but in some way he was to help them reach unity. An example of the value of Christian mediation. Yes, we can pray for unity. We can ask the Holy Spirit to humble us. But sometimes our hearts are still hardened. We may need a human third party to help us see where we are still holding back, where we are not really seeking the Lord, but seeking our own way. And this third party should be a "true companion"—a mature believer, a coworker in the Gospel, a wise judge.

No matter what the disagreement, no matter what the process, it is clear that Paul wants them to come to an agreement. Not fight even more and possibly cause a split in the church. Not even agree to disagree. But to actually come to an agreement "in the Lord" (4:2). He clearly saw this as necessary to their working together to advance the Gospel.

Have you ever been in a disagreement with someone in the church? What did you do?

Have you ever seen a church split because of a disagreement between two leaders? What kind of damage did it cause? Do you think it could have been prevented if the two leaders had humbled themselves and sought the Lord together?

What are some ways you've seen conflict resolution work?

How might a humble approach to conflict resolution affect our church and our witness? Our ability to advance the Gospel?

Philippians 4:4-7 [Read]

Sub-Point 2: Rejoice in the Lord in all things, show reasonableness to the world, give worries to the Lord, and be thankful.

Describe any connections you see between all of the things Paul is commanding them to do in this section.

How can prayer help with worry?

Why would reasonableness in the Church community be a good witness to the world?

In this paragraph, Paul gives a series of imperatives^{vii}:

- **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

Note: It might be helpful for your class to see this written this way on the board or even to have it written with the imperatives circled.

Rejoice: Paul said it twice, just in case they didn't hear it the first time. And rejoice *always* (4:4). There is no situation—good or bad—which does not warrant rejoicing. Because all of it can be used to advance the Gospel. All of it can be used to mold us into the person Christ wants us to be. As he said in chapter 1, Paul even rejoiced in his own suffering (1:12-18). Paul can say “rejoice always” and mean it because of his perspective on the purpose of life—that to live is Christ and to die is gain (1:21). So, good or bad, life or death, suffering or not, plenty or hunger, abundance or need, it was *all joy* (4:13).

If you are a believer, though you may be sad or angry or frustrated, there is always cause to rejoice. Because in *every* situation, God is working in you and through you. For discipleship—to make you more like Jesus. And for evangelism—to advance the Gospel to the world. This doesn't mean you have to be happy all the time. Or plaster on a big smile so everyone will think being a Christian is great. Jesus felt sorrow (John 11:33). He wept (John 11:35). He felt anger (Matthew 21:12). He even asked not to have to suffer if there were any other way (Luke 22:42).

But none of that stopped His joy. Even on the eve of His death, His joy was full (John 15:11). Because His joy was *in the Lord*. As God said through Nehemiah to the people, “The joy of the Lord is your strength” (Nehemiah 8:10). Almost every time Paul uses the word *rejoice*, he

includes “in the Lord.” If we put our hope in the Lord, our trust in the Lord, nothing that happens will be able to shake our joy. The key to joy isn’t in our circumstances; it’s in the Lord Himself.

Make known your reasonableness: Many versions translate it *gentleness* (4:5), which can be misleading, because in our culture, it can sound weak, as if you’re a pushover. The word translated as *reasonableness* was generally used by the Greeks to refer to the gods or the nobles who were characterized by their “gentle forbearance toward others.”^{viii} Wise restraint, equity and justice. Paul exhorted them to make this known to all. The “to all” particularly reminds us of the Philippians’ fear of those who opposed them from chapter 1 (vv. 27-28).

Paul told them to stand firm, not to be afraid, to show forbearance to those who oppose them. To be the bigger people. To treat people with kindness and equity, even if those people were not being kind to them. The definition of the Golden Rule. This kind of an attitude would reflect Jesus to the world around them. Gentle forbearance is the external result of the inward attitudes Paul calls them to—joy, peace and thanksgiving. If they practice these things, they will reflect reasonableness to the world, reflecting God’s character and His love and drawing people into the Gospel.

Do not be anxious: We must keep in mind the Philippians’ suffering when we read this passage. Just as Paul called them to rejoice in their suffering, he also exhorted them not to worry, but bring their requests to God (4:6). Though they are two separate imperatives, they are intimately connected. *The way not to worry is to make your requests known before God.* By bringing them to Him and leaving them there. Trusting that you don’t need to worry about them, because He will take care of them. In the right way, in His timing, in a way that is better for us than we could ever imagine for ourselves.

This is how we can live a life that is not characterized by worry. Not in an “ignorance is bliss” kind of way. It doesn’t mean we just bury our heads in the sand and ignore all the mess that is going on around us. It means we simply trust God, eyes wide open, and when we start to feel worry creeping in, we give it up to Him in prayer.

Between these two imperatives, Paul reminded them that “the Lord is near.” This phrase could either mean that the Day of the Lord is coming soon or that God is near to those who love Him. In this context, between these two imperatives and coupled with the “the God of peace will be with you” in verse 9, it is most likely talking about the closeness of their relationship with God. Because God is near to them, they will make their reasonableness known to the world. Because God is near to them, they do not need to be anxious.^{ix}

Make known your requests: This is the cure for worry—to bring it to God in prayer. Whatever you’re dealing with, whatever you’re anxious about, whatever keeps you up at night or runs

through your head in traffic, pray about it. Don't stew on it, make it known to God. *With thanksgiving*. In the first chapter of this letter, Paul talked about thankfulness in prayer, how an attitude of thankfulness can change your entire outlook on life. Thanking God for the good gifts He has given us opens our eyes to see His gifts more and more. Instead of anxiety about what may come, our hearts are filled with thanksgiving for what God has done.

When you do that, your hearts and your minds will be filled with peace, a supernatural peace that only comes from God, a peace beyond human understanding. When we let go of the worry, we have peace. Psalm 46:10 says "*Cease striving and know that I am God.*" We don't just let go and leave things to chance or cross our fingers and hope that it works out OK. We let go and let God handle it. Researchers have discovered that 85 percent of what people worry about never even happens.^x Anxiety is a fear of what *might* happen. Which can be fixed by trusting in a God who controls what happens. Trusting that whatever He wills will happen, and whatever He wills will be for our good (Romans 8:28).

That's at least part of what it means to have a childlike faith. Most 3-year-olds don't worry about how they're going to pay the rent or where their next meal is coming from. They don't even think about it; they just trust that their parents will provide. The only time children do worry is when they have a parent who can't provide or doesn't provide for them. God the Father can provide everything we need and delights to do so. Trust "works" for us because the One we're trusting in is trustworthy.

The absolutes in these verses are used intentionally—be anxious about *nothing*; in *everything* pray (v. 6). Everything means everything. The big things and the little things. All the time. In every situation. No matter the situation. Because our faith isn't based on our situations. It's based on Jesus. And He is *always* faithful. So we can *always* be at peace.

Not that we *are* always at peace. We are human. No matter how long we've been following Jesus, worry can still creep in sometimes. Like a recovering alcoholic who feels the urge to drink and immediately calls his or her sponsor, we are all *recovering* worriers. When the urge comes, we need to pray. Right away. And if it doesn't go away right away, keep praying. Dig deeper. Ask again. Examine your heart to see if you are really letting it go, or if you're still holding to that worry. This is why the Bible says "pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Because that's what it takes. Constant, vigilant prayer.

Do you know anyone who seems to be filled with supernatural peace? How does it affect the way they live their lives?

Do you know anyone who shows gentle forbearance to their enemies? What does this say about their character to the people around them?

What things do you tend to worry about? Why?

What things are you thankful to God for?

Philippians 4:8-9 [Read]

Sub-Point 3: Think about godly things.

Does what you spend your time thinking about matter? Why or why not?

Look at that list... true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent, worthy of praise... what do all of these things have in common?

Here we have another imperative, but since this one starts with “Finally, brothers,” it is a new section (3:1), though it is still connected to the section before. The “peace of God” in verse 7 and “the God of peace” in verse 9 serve as bookends. This section describes what “guarded hearts and minds” look like (v. 7). This is the positive side of the “*do not* be anxious”—what we *should do* instead. Pray and think about godly things.

Paul commanded them to “think about” these godly things. None of the translations do a great job of getting the connotation of this word. It means counting, reckoning, or taking into account. It’s almost a math word, an accounting term. It’s used in Romans 4 to talk about God’s *crediting* righteousness to Abraham, based on his faith. It’s used in Luke 22:37 to talk about Christ being *numbered* with the transgressors. In this context, it sounds a lot like the old saying, “count your blessings.” It’s as if Paul is saying that we should count all the good things in life—whatever is good, noble, excellent, etc., we should add it up, and remember those things.

It can also mean “carefully consider.” It’s not just a fleeting thought, it is really considering what is good, right, noble, pure, in all things, all day long, throughout our whole lives. It’s a consistent, careful, calculating kind of thinking. The kind of thinking that changes the way we live and act. If we carefully consider what is pure all day long, we will become more pure. If we carefully consider excellent things all day long, we will become more excellent.

If we want to have godly behavior, it all starts in our minds. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus breaks the Ten Commandments down to the heart behind them, and tells us that having sinful thoughts are just as bad as doing the sinful actions themselves. Lusting after a woman is committing adultery with her in your heart (Matthew 5:27-30). Being angry with someone is killing them in your heart (Matthew 5:21-26).

If our citizenship is really in heaven (3:20), we should set our minds on heavenly things. Live with an eternal perspective. Those who set their mind on earthly things will live with an earthly perspective. Their god is their stomach, meaning their own pleasure (3:19). How many people do we know who live that way? Their whole goal in life is their own pleasure—their next vacation, what they will do with their weekend, the next car they will buy, what food they will eat or clothes they will wear or how they will spend their time. All of it is about themselves and their own pleasure.

But Paul's life was all about Christ. Remember? *To live is Christ and to die is gain* (1:21). For our lives to be about Christ, to advance the Gospel, it starts with our minds. And our actions flow from there.

Why do we have trouble controlling our thoughts?

How do you think your life would change if you really dwelled on these things?

How would your life be different if you lived with an eternal perspective?

Week 9, Philippians 4:1-9

Took

Main Point: We advance the Gospel by unity, rejoicing in all things, giving our worries to God, dwelling on the things of God, and reflecting reasonableness to the world.

Don't worry; pray.

Have persons write a list of things they are currently worried about.

Now have them find a partner and share a little bit about your worries, whatever you are comfortable sharing, and pray for the other person's worries. In the Philippians passage, Paul tells us to present our own requests before God and there is something that happens in that action of our laying those things down before God. But this exercise is in praying for each other and for listening to how someone else prays for your worries. Sometimes we are so wrapped up in our own struggles that we can't even see straight. Just as the two women in Philippi needed a third party mediator to help them see straight, sometimes hearing someone else pray for us can bring us some clarity in the things we are worried about. Plus, it's just always good to pray for one another.

Challenges

Take your worries to God in prayer. God wants us to make our requests known to Him instead of worrying about them in our own hearts. We can find freedom in giving them up to Him.

Rejoice in all things, give thanks in all things. At the end of each day make a list. A joy and thanks list. What things that happened to you today are you thankful for, good or bad? For the "bad" things in particular, describe how you can rejoice in them and give thanks in them, even though the world would consider them bad things. The more we practice this, the more we will see these things.

Think about godly things. The command from Paul was to think about these godly things all day long. What if we actually practiced doing that every day for a week? Set a timer on your phone to go off every hour. When the time goes off, spend one minute in meditation or contemplation on godly things. Do this every hour for the whole waking day. For a whole week. See what happens. See if your attitude changes, if your heart changes, if your actions change.

ⁱ "Recognizing Anxiety: Symptoms, Signs, and Risk Factors," Healthline - <http://www.healthline.com/health/anxiety/effects-on-body>

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- ii “Facts and Statistics” Anxiety and Depression Association of America - <https://adaa.org/about-adaa/press-room/facts-statistics> .
- iii Glenn O’Neal and Erin Connors, “APA Public Opinion Poll,” American Psychiatric Association, March 2018.
- iv Richard R. Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, The New American Commentary vol. 32 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1991), 145.
- v Richard R. Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, The New American Commentary vol. 32 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1991), 147.
- vi G. Walter Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 283.
- vii Gordon D. Fee, *Philippians, The IVP New Testament Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999), 174.
- viii Gordon D. Fee, *Philippians, The IVP New Testament Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999), 174.
- ix Gordon D. Fee, *Philippians, The IVP New Testament Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999), 174.
- x Don Joseph Goewey, “85% of What We Worry About Never Happens,” The Huffington Post, Aug 25, 2015