Spurgeon on Philippians

Philippians 3:8 The Priceless Prize

NO. 3209

A SERMON PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, AUGUST 4TH, 1910, DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON, AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON

"That I may win Christ." — Philippians 3:8 (note)

The very high value that the apostle Paul set upon the Savior, is most palpable, when he speaks of winning Him. This shows that the Savior held the same place in Paul's esteem as the crown did in the esteem of the runner at the Olympic games. To gain that crown, the competitor strained every nerve and sinew, feeling as though he were content to drop down dead at the goal if he might but win it. Paul felt that were he to run with all his might, if that, were the way of winning Christ, were he to strain soul and body to win Him, he would be well worth the effort. He shows his value of Christ by speaking of Him as the prize he panted to win. He uses the very same word which the soldier would use concerning the victory, when, with garments rolled in blood, amidst confused noise and clouds of smoke, he counts all things but little if he may but hear the shout of triumph. So, Paul, regarding Christ as more glorious and excellent than mountains of prey, considered such a prize to be worth all the fighting, even though he should agonize and sweat with blood. He would be well worth dying to win. I take it that he speaks of Christ here as though he felt that he was the very climax of his desire, the summit of his ambition. If he might but get Christ, he would be perfectly satisfied; but if he could not get Him, whatever else he might have, he would still remain unblessed.

I would to God that you all felt the same. I wish that the ambition of every one of my fellow-creatures here assembled — and, indeed, the wide world over, — were this, that they might win Christ. Oh, if they did but know His preciousness, if they did but understand how happy and how blessed He makes those to be who gain Him, they, too, would give up everything else for this one desire, — that they may win Christ. I hope that, perhaps, a few words of mine may be blessed of God the Spirit to stir up such a desire in the hearts of the congregation now assembled below then shall I begin?

I. While You Have Not Christ, You Are In A Very Ill Condition, — Should Not This Make You Long For Him?

Consider, my dear hearer, thou who art Christless to-night, what thou art, and where thou art. Thou art a sinner, — that thou knowest. Without Christ, thou art an unpardoned sinner, a condemned sinner, and ere long thou wilt he a sinner judged, sentenced, and cast into hell! Dost thou not know that? Thou art a diseased sinner. Sin is the leprosy which is in thee; and without Christ, thou art sick without a physician. For thee there is no balm in Gilead, no physician there. Thy sickness is mortal. It will certainly be thy ruin, for thou hast no Savior. Thou art a mortal man; thou canst not doubt it. Thou wilt soon die, and canst thou tell what it will be to die without Christ? Hast thou ever formed an idea of what it will be to pass into the realm of separate spirits with no rod to lean on, and no staff to comfort thee in the dark valley? Man, thou art an immortal being; thou knowest that, too. Thou wilt not cease, to be when thou diest. Thou wilt live again; and what will it be to live again without Christ? It will be to live the life of a condemned spirit, withered by the wrath of God, scathed by the lightning of divine justice! Canst thou think of that without dismay?

"Sinner, is thy heart at rest?
Is thy bosom void of fear?
Art thou not by guilt oppress'd?
Speaks not conscience in thy ear?

"Can this world afford thee bliss?
Can it chase away thy gloom?
Flattering, false, and vain it is;
Tremble at the worldling's doom."

Why, even now, man, I think I can see thee. Thou art like the ship upon the lake of Gennesareth, tempest-tossed. The winds howl about her, every timber creaks, the sail is rent to ribands, and the mast is going by the board; and for thee there is no Savior to come and walk the billows, and to say, "It is I; be not afraid!" At the helm of thy ship there sleeps no Savior who can arise, and say to

the waves, “Peace, be still!” Thou art a ship in a storm, with none to rescue thee, seeing that thou hast no Savior. The devil has scuttled thee. There are holes bored through and through thy spirit’s hope and confidence, and it will go down before long in depths of unutterable woe.

I think I see thee again. Thou art like Lazarus in the grave, and by this time thou art foul and noxious, for thou hast been dead these thirty or forty years, and that death has festered into putrid corruption. Yes, there thou art, and thou hast no Christ to say, “Roll away the stone.” Thou hast no Christ to say, “Lazarus, come forth!” no Savior to bid thy friends loose thee, and let thee go! I think I see thee yet again. Thou hast been singing of the dying thief. We often sing of him; and thou wilt die as the thief died, only — only there will be no Christ hanging on the cross, from whom thou shalt hear the words, “This day shalt thou be with me in paradise.”

Unto what shall I liken thee, and wherewith shall I compare thee? A soul without Christ! Why, it were better for thee, man, that thou hadst never been born if thou shalt continue so! Thou wouldst be better off with the mill-stone about thy neck, and cast into the sea, if that would make an end of thee; thou wert happier far than thou art now without Christ, for without Christ thou art without God, and without hope in the world. Thou art a sheep lost on the mountains, and no Shepherd to find thee; a soul wandering in the blackness of darkness, and no lamp to guide thy wandering footsteps; and soon thou wilt be a desolate spirit, without a ray of comfort, without a home, shut out in the blackness of darkness for ever! Does not that make thee long for Christ? It would, if I could make thee feel what I can only say. I can only deal with your outward ears, my Master must deal with your hearts; and I do pray him, by his almighty Spirit, to make you feel so wretched without Christ that you will not dare to sleep to-night until you have sought him, and laid hold upon him, and said to him, “I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.”

O ye souls out of Christ, I could, with half a moment’s thought, stop and burst into tears, and say no more; but I must command myself, for I must speak to you; and I do pray you, by the living God, unless you are beside yourselves, if you have any love to your own souls, fly to Christ; seek the Lord; try to lay hold upon him, for as you now are, your position is perilous in the extreme!

“Come, guilty souls, and flee away
Like doves to Jesu’s wounds
This is the welcome gospel-day,
Wherein free grace abounds.

“God loved the church, and gave his Son
To drink the cup of wrath;
And Jesus says he’ll cast out none
That come to him by faith.”

II. We will now change the strain, but not the object. Remember, that All The Things In The World Are Vain Without Christ.

The world’s goods, its substance, its riches, its pleasures, its pomp, its fame, what are all these without Christ? They are a painted pageantry to go to hell in! They are a mockery to an immortal spirit. They are a mirage of the wilderness, deluding the traveler, but not yielding to his desires one substantial drop of joy. There have been those in this world who have tried it, and they say, “It sounds, it sounds, it sounds, because it is empty and hollow as a drum.” It is

“False as the smooth, deceitful sea,
And empty as the whistling wind.”

There is nothing in it all.

“Honour’s a puff of noisy breath,
And gain a heap of yellow clay.”

And what is even power itself but anxiety and care? Solomon knew the world at its best, and his verdict upon her was, “Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity.” Without Christ, sinner, you will find the world to be unsatisfactory. When you have tried it at its best, you will turn from it, and say, “I have been deceived! I have eaten the wind, and I am not satisfied. I am like one that feasteth in a dream, and waketh, and, lo! he is hungry.” Without Christ, you will not even find this world to be comfortable. Perhaps there are none so unhappy as those who are surrounded with what we think to be the means of happiness. I know this, if I had to find the extreme of wretchedness, I should not go to the dens of poverty, but I should go amongst men surrounded with the trappings of wealth, and find you hearts broken with anguish, and spirits wrung with griefs which they could not tell. Oh, yes! the world is a heap of chaff; the only solid treasure is to be found in Christ; and if you neglect him, you neglect all that is worth the having.

Besides, all this world must soon pass away. See how it melts! Or, if it melts not from you, you must melt from it. There down goes

the ship; she floated gaily but an hour before, but she foundered, and she is gone; and now, merchant, what wilt thou do? Thy vessel has gone down with all thy treasure on board, and thou art left penniless! Oh, happy are they who lay up their treasure in Christ, for no shipwreck need they fear! But, oh! —

"This world's a dream, an empty show," —
which cannot satisfy an immortal soul.

Further than this, let me remind you, my dear healer, that if you have not Christ, nothing else will avail for you. A profession of religion will only be a sort of respectable pall to throw over the corpse of your dead soul. Nay, a profession of religion, if you have not Christ in it will be a swift witness against you to condemn you. What right have you to profess to be a follower of Christ, unless Christ be in you the hope of glory? And to have listened to the ministry of the Word will be of no use to you if you do not get Christ. Alas, alas! what can our poor sermons do? Our prayers, our hymns,-what are they all? Ah! and what will your baptism be, and what will the Lord's supper be, unless by faith you grasp a Savior? These ordinances, though ordained of God himself, are wells without water, and clouds without rain, unless they get us Christ, who is the sum and substance of them all. It will be of no use to you that you were regular in your private prayers, that you were good to the poor, that you were generous to the church, that you were constantly in your attendance upon the outward means of grace. I say, as I said before, that all these are but a painted pageantry for your soul to go to hell in, except you have Christ. You may as surely go down to the pit by the religious road as by the irreligious. If you have not Christ, you have not salvation, whatever else you may have.

> **"Give me Christ, or else I die,"** — should be your daily and nightly prayer; for all else must destroy you if you have not a Savior.

And let me tell thee, dear healer, that thy repentance, if it does not lead thee to Christ, will need to be repented of; and thy faith, if it be not based upon his atoning sacrifice, is a faith that is not the faith of God's elect; and all thy convictions of sin — all the visions that have scared thee, all the fears that have haunted thee, — will only be a prelude to something worse, unless thou gettest Christ. There is one door, and if thou goest not through that, climbing up some other way, though it be never so tedious, will not answer thy turn. Thou must even go down to hell after all thine efforts, all thy repentings, all thy believings, unless thy soul can say-

"My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesu's blood and righteousness;
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
But wholly lean on Jesu's name:
On Christ, the solid rock, I stand;
All other ground is sinking sand."

Oh, how this ought to make you long for Christ, when you think that everything else is but a bauble when compared with him: and bethink you what a state you are in as long as you are destitute of him!

III. I must not tarry, so let me remind you, my dear hearer, though you cannot possibly know how anxious I am to speak so that you may feel what I say, that Nothing Can Make Ammends To You For Losing Christ.

I know how it is with some of you. You say you cannot afford to follow Christ. Your trade — your wicked trade, you would have to give that up; for it happens to be an ungodly calling. Well now, friend, let me take thee by the button-hole a minute. Which hadst thou better be, a beggar and go to heaven, or a duke, and go to hell? Come, now, which hadst thou better do, go to heaven with an empty pocket or go down to the pit with a full one? All ye who worship Mammon, I know how you will answer, but you who have souls above earth, I hope you will reply, "Nothing in the form of wealth will compensate us for losing our souls." Men have been known, on their dying beds to have their money-bags brought to them, and they have put them to their hearts, and have said, "This won't do," and they have taken up another, and put it to their palpitating hearts, and said again, "This won't do." Ah, no, it cannot cure a heart-ache; what can it do for a soul in eternity? Is it not a painful thing to attend upon some men who die rich in ill-gotten gain? What are they the better for their wealth? They only have it said of them, "He died worth so much;" that is all, but they sleep, in the same earth, and the same worms devour them. There is more fighting over their graves, and more joy because they are gone, among the heirs who divide the plunder, while, oftentimes, the poor man has the honest tears of his children shed upon a coffin which they have had to contribute to purchase out of their little savings, and the grave itself has been prepared by the charity of some who found in their father's character the only patrimony which he had to bequeath. Oh, may God grant you grace to perceive that all the riches you can ever get would never make up for losing Christ!

Some lose Christ for the sake of fame. It is not a fashionable thing to be a Christian. To be a Christian after the world's sort, I grant you, is; but after the sort of the New Testament, it is not; and many say, "Well, it is not fashionable," and they bend to the fashion; and many do the same in another way, for young men are laughed out of going to the house of God, and young women are decoyed

from attending the means of grace by the laughter, and jeers, and jokes of their companions. Remember that they can laugh you into hell, but they can never laugh you out again; and that, though their jokes may shut the door, their jokes can never open that door again. Oh, is this all? Will you sell your souls to escape from a fool's laughter? Then, what a fool you must be yourself! What, are you so thin-skinned that you cannot bear to be questioned, or to be asked whether you are a follower of the Lord Jesus? Ah, sir, you shall have that thin skin of yours tormented more than enough in the world to come, when shame, which you dread so much, shall be your everlasting portion! O soul, how canst thou sell Christ for the applause of men? How canst thou give him up for the laughter of fools?

Some give Jesus Christ up for the pleasures of the world, but can the giddy dance for a few minutes of this life be worth the torments of the world to come? Oh, weigh, like wise men, — as merchants weigh their goods against the gold, — I pray you, weigh your souls against the pleasures of this world. Oh, where is the pleasure? Even Tiberius, in his desert island, when he had ransacked the world to find a new joy, could not, if he could give us all the mirth he knew, tell us of anything that would be worth the casting away of the soul. This pearl is too priceless for the world to attempt to purchase it. I pray you, be wise enough to feel that nothing can compensate you for this loss, and do seek Jesus and may you find him to-night!

IV. A fourth observation, upon which I shall not enlarge, is this, — Depend Upon It, That Whatever You Lose For Christ's Sake Will Be A Blessed Loss For You.

Gregory Nazianzen, a foremost father of the Christian Church, rejoiced that he was well versed in the Athenian philosophy; and why do you think be rejoiced in that? Because he had to give it all up when he became a Christian; and said he, "I thank God that I had a philosophy to throw away." He counted it no loss, but a gain, to be a loser of such learned lumber when he found a Savior. Says an old divine, who would refuse to give up a whole sky full of stars if he could buy a sun therewith, and who would refuse to give up all the comforts of this life if he could have Christ at so goodly a price?" That grand old Ignatius, one of the earliest of the Church fathers, said, "Give me burning, give me hanging, give me all the torments of hell; if I may but act my Savior, I would fain be content to bear them all as a price." And so might we. Did I not tell you of the martyrs Sitting and singing in old Bonner's damp coal-hole, and one of them writing, "There are six brave companions with me in this paradise, and we do sit and sing in the dark all day"? Ah, yes, they were no losers. Did not Rutherford say, when he declared that he had but one eye, and his enemies had put that out, — for that one eye was the preaching of the gospel, an eye to the glory of God, and his enemies had made him silent in Aberdeen, so that he used to weep over his dumb and silent Sabbaths, yet did be not say, "But how mistaken they are! They thought they sent me to a dungeon, but Christ has been so precious to me, that I thought it to be the king's parlour, and the very paradise of God"? And did not Renwick say that, oftentimes, when he had been out among the bogs on the Scotch mountains, hunted over the mosses, with the stars of God looking down upon the little congregation, that they had far more of God's fellowship than bishops had ever had in cathedrals, or than they themselves had ever had in their circles, when, in brighter days, they had worshipped God in peace? The dragoons of Claverhouse, and the uniformity of Charles II. were incapable of quenching the joy of our Puritanic and Covenanting forefathers. Their piety drew its mirth from deeper springs shall kings could stop, or persecution could dry up. The saints of Christ have given Christ their all, and when they have given all, they have felt that they were the richer for their poverty, the happier for their sorrows; and when they have been in solitude for Christ, they have felt that they have had good company, for he has been with them to be their strength and their joy. You may have Christ at what price you will, but you will make a good bargain of it. I charge thee, my dear hearer, if it should come to this, that thou shouldst have to sell thy house and thy home, if the wife of thy bosom should become thine enemy, if thy children should refuse to know their own father or to look him in the face, if thou shouldst be banished from thy country, if there should be a halter for thy neck, and nor grave for thy body, thou wouldst make a good bargain in taking up my Lord and Master; for, oh he will own you in the day when men disown you; and in the day when he cometh, there shall be none so bright as those who have suffered for him.

"And they who, with their Leader,
Have conquer'd in the fight,
For ever and for ever
Are clad in robes of white."

Yes, if you suffer with him, you shall also be glorified together. God grant you grace to feel this to be true, and to make any sacrifice so long as you can but "win Christ, and be found in him."

V. If Ever You Do Get Christ, You Will Find Him All Gain, And No Loss.

The apostle says, "That I may win Christ." It is all winning, and no losing. Why, if you get Christ, you will get life. Does He not give life and immortality to those that have him? Yea, saith he, "he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live." If you get

Christ, you will get light. He said, “I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness.” The Sun of righteousness shall arise upon you. Get Christ, and you shall get health, your soul shall leave her sicknesses with him who bore her sickness in the days of his flesh. Get Christ, and you shall get riches, “the unsearchable riches of Christ.” You may be poor, perhaps, outwardly; but you shall be rich yourselves, and be able to make many others rich, — rich in faith, giving glory to God. Get Christ, and prosperity shall not hurt you, your feet shall be like hinds’ feet, to stand upon your high places. Get Christ, and he will turn your bitter Marahs into sweet Elims. He is the tree which, when put into the brackish water, makes it sweet to the taste. Affliction is no longer affliction when Christ is with us. Then the furnace glows, not with heat alone, but with a golden radiance, a present glory, when Christ treads the burning coals.

Get Christ, beloved, and you have got all your soul can wish for. Now may you stretch your capacious powers to the utmost, and, with a holy covetousness, and a sacred greediness, desire all you can. You may open your mouth wide, for Christ will fill it. You may enlarge your desires, but the infinite riches of Christ will satisfy them at their largest, and widest stretch. Get Christ, and you have heaven on earth, and shall have heaven for ever. Get Christ, and angels shall be your servitors; the wheels of providence shall grind for your good, the chariot of God, which brings on the events prophesied in apocalyptic vision, shall bring only joy and peace to you; and you shall hear it said, both in time and in eternity,

“’Tis with the righteous well.”

Get Christ, and you have nothing to fear, and everything to hope for. Get Christ, and sin is buried in the Red Sea of Jesu’s blood, while, you are arrayed in the spotless righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ, — Jehovah Tsidkenu himself. Get Christ, and — what more shall I say? Then may you swim in seas of bliss, then may you walk Elysian fields of holy joy even here on earth. Get Christ, and you need not envy the angels. Get Christ, and you may count yourselves to be raised up together, and made to sit together in heavenly places with him.

Surely all this ought to make the sinner’s mouth water to get Christ! It ought to make his heart ache till he gets Christ. It ought to set his soul a-hungering and a-thirsting till he gets Jesus. It ought to make him resolve that he will not be kept back till at last he gets a firm hold upon the Crucified.

VI. My last remark shall be this, We Shall Understand All This A Great Deal Better Very Soon.

There is a curtain, but it is lifting, it is lifting, it is lifting; and when it is lifted, what do I see? The spirit world! ’Tis death that lifts the curtain; and when it is lifted, these present things will vanish, for they are but shadows. The world of eternity and reality will then be seen. I would summon a jury of the spirits that have passed that curtain, and they would not be long debating about the question whether Christ is worth the winning. I care not where you select them from, — whether from among the condemned in hell, or from among the beatified in heaven. Let them sit, let, even those who are in hell sit, and judge upon the matter and if they could for once speak honestly, they would tell you that it is a dreadful thing to despise Christ, now that they have come to see things in a true light, — now that they are, lost for ever, for ever, for ever, — now that they are crushed with knowledge and feeling which have come too late to be profitable, — now they wish that they had listened to the ministrations of truth, to the proclamations of the gospel. If they could have a sane mind back again, they would shriek, “Oh, for one more Sabbath! Oh, to listen once more to an honest preacher, though his words might be clumsy and uncouth! Oh, to hear a voice once more say, ’Come to Jesus while the day of mercy lasts!’ Oh, to be once more pressed to come to the marriage-feast, — once more bidden to look to Jesus and to live!” I tell you sirs, some of you who make so light of Sundays, and think preaching is but a pastime, so that you come here to hear us as you would go to hear some fiddler on a weeknight, — I tell you, sirs, the lost in hell reckon these things at a very different rate, and so will you ere long, when another preacher, with skeleton fingers, shall talk to you upon your death-bed. Ah! then you will see that we were in earnest, and you were the players, and you will comprehend that what we said to you demanded earnest, immediate attention, though, alas! you would not give, it, and so played false to your own soul, and committed spiritual suicide, and went your way like a bullock to the slaughter, to be the murderers of your own spirits!

But suppose I summoned a jury of bright spirits from heaven?

Ah! they would not need to consider, but I am sure they would unanimously say to you, if they might, “Seek ye, the Lord while he may be found, seek the Lord and his strength; seek the Lord and his face evermore; put your trust in Jesus, for he is sweet beyond all sweetness.” May you do this, and may you sing, —

“Oh! spread thy savor on my frame,
No sweetness is so sweet;
Till I get up to sing thy name
Where all thy singers meet.”

Pray that prayer.

Ask him to save you, and may the Lord bless you,
for Jesus' sake! Amen.

Philippians 4:19 A New Year's Wish

NO. 3231

A SERMON PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, JANUARY 5TH, 1911, DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON, AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"But my God shall supply all your need, according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus."-Philippians 4:19 (note)

THE Philippians had several times sent presents to Paul, to supply his necessities. Though they were not themselves rich, yet they made a contribution, and sent Epaphroditus with it, "an odour of sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well pleasing to God." Paul felt very grateful: he thanked God, but he did not forget also to thank the donors; he wished them, every blessing, and he did as good as say, "You have supplied my need, and my God shall supply yours. You have supplied my need of temporal food and raiment out of your poverty; my God shall supply all your need out of his riches in glory." "As," he says, in the eighteenth verse, "I have all and abound: I am full," "so," he adds, "'my God shall supply all your need.' You have sent what you gave me by the hand of a beloved brother, but God will send a better messenger to you, for he will supply all your need 'by Christ Jesus.'" Every single word sounds as if he had thought it over, and the Spirit of God had guided him in his meditation, so that he should to the fullest extent wish them back a blessing similar to that which they had sent to him, only of a richer and more enduring kind.

Now, on this New Year's Day I would desire, somewhat in the spirit of Paul, to bless those of you who have supplied, according to your abilities, the wants of God's work in my hands, and have given, even out of your poverty, to the cause of God, according as there has been need. I count myself to be personally your debtor though your gifts have been for the students, and the orphans, and the colporteurs, and not for myself. In return for your kindness, after the manner of his gracious love, "my God shall supply all your need, according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus."

This verse is particularly sweet to me, for, when we were building the Orphanage, I foresaw that, if we had no voting, and no collecting of annual subscriptions, but depended upon the goodness of God, and the voluntary offerings of his people, we should have times of trial, and therefore I ordered the masons to place upon the first columns of the Orphanage entrance, these words, "My God shall supply all your need, according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus." The text therefore is out in stone upon the right hand and upon the left of the great archway. There stands this declaration of our confidence in God; and as long as God lives, we shall never need be remove it, for he will certainly supply the needs of his own work. While we serve him, he will furnish our tables for us.

I. The text might suggest to us a field of gloomy thought, if we wished to indulge the melancholy vein, for it speaks of "all your need." So, first, behold A Great Necessity: "all your need."

What a gulf! What an abyss! "**All your need**." I do not know how many believers made up the church at Philippi, but the need of one saint is great enough; what must many need? It would not be possible to tell the number of God's children on earth, but the text comprehends the need of the whole chosen family, "all your need." We will not ask you to reckon up the wonderful draught upon the divine exchequer which must be made by all the needs of all the saints who are yet on earth: but please think of your own need; that will be more within the compass of your experience and the range of your meditation. May the Lord supply your need and all your need!

There is our temporal need, and that is no little matter. If we have food and raiment, we should be therewith content; but there are many of God's people to when the mere getting of food and raiment is a wearisome toil; and what with household cares, family trials, sickness of body, losses in business, and sometimes the impossibility of obtaining suitable labor, many of God's saints are as hard put to it as Elijah was when he sat by the brook Cherith. If God did not send them their bread and meat in a remarkable manner, they would surely starve; but their bread shall be given them, and their water shall be sure. "My God shall supply all your need." You have, perhaps, a large family, and your needs are therefore greatly increased, but the declaration of the text includes the whole of your needs personal and relative.

After all, our temporal needs are very small compared with our spiritual needs. A man may, with the blessing of God, pretty readily provide for the wants of the body, but who shall provide for the requirements of the soul? There is need of perpetual pardon, for we are always sinning; and Jesus Christ's blood is always pleading for us, and cleansing us from sin. Every day there is need of fresh strength battle against inward sin; and, blessed be God, it is daily supplied, so that our youth is renewed like the eagle's. As good soldiers of Jesus Christ, we need armor from head to foot, and even then we do not know how to wear the armor, or how to wield the sword, unless he who gave us these sacred implements shall be always with us. Warring saint, God will supply all your need by his presence and Spirit. But we are not merely warriors, we are also workers. We are called, many of us, to important spheres of labor, (and, indeed, let no man think his sphere unimportant,) but here also our hands shall be sufficient for us, and we shall accomplish our life-work. You have need to be helped to do the right thing, at the right time, in the right spirit, and in the right manner; your need, as a Sunday-school teacher, as an open-air preacher, and especially as a minister of the gospel, will be very great; but the text meets all your requirements, "My God shall supply all your need." Then comes our need in suffering, for many of us are called to take our turn in the Lord's prison-house. Here we need patience under pain, and hope under depression of spirit. Who is sufficient for furnace-work? Our God will supply us with those choice graces and consolations which shall strengthen us to glorify his name even in the fires. He will either make the burden lighter, or the burden stronger; he will diminish the need, or increase the supply.

Beloved, it is impossible for me to mention all the forms of our spiritual need. We need to be daily converted from some sin or other, which, perhaps, we have scarcely known to be sin. We need to be instructed in the things of God, we need to be illuminated as to the mind of Christ, we need to be comforted by the promises, we need to be quickened by the precepts, we need to be strengthened by the doctrines. We need, oh, what do we not need? We are just a bag of wants, and a heap of infirmities. If any one of us were to keep a want-book, as I have seen tradesmen do, what a huge folio it would need to be; and it might be written within and without, and crossed and re-crossed, for we are full of wants from the first of January to the end of December; but here is the mercy, "My God shall supply all your need." Are you put in high places? Have you many comforts? Do you enjoy wealth? What need you have to be kept from loving the world, to be preserved from wantonness and pride, and the follies and fashions of this present evil world. My God will supply your need in that respect. Are you very poor? Then the temptation is to envy, to bitterness of spirit, to rebellion against God. "My God shall supply all your need." Are you alone in the world? Then you need the Lord Jesus to be your Companion; and, your Companion he will be. Have you many around you? Then you have need of grace to set them a good example, to bring up your children, and manage your household in the fear of God." My God shall supply all your need." You have need, in times of joy, to be kept sober and steady; you have need, in times of sorrow, to be strong and quit yourselves like men; you have needs in living, and you will have needs in dying, but your last need shall be supplied as surely as your first. "My God shall supply all your need."

Come, then, brethren, and look down into this great gulf of need, and exultingly say, "O Lord, we thank thee that our needs are great, for there is the more room for thy love, thy tenderness, thy power, thy faithfulness, to fill the chasm."

That first thought, which I said might be a gloomy one, has all the dreariness taken out of it by four others equally true, but each of them full of good cheer. The text not only mentions a great necessity, but it mentions also a great Helper: "My God;" next, a great supply: "My God shall supply all your need;" thirdly, an abundant store out of which to draw the gift: "according to his riches in glory;" and lastly, a glorious channel through which the supply shall come: "by Christ Jesus."

II. So, for our enormous wants here is A Great Helper: My God shall supply all your need."

Whose God is that? Why, Paul's God. That is one of the matters in which the greatest saints are no better off than the very least, for though Paul called the Lord "My God," he is my God too. My dear old friend who sits yonder, and has nothing but a few pence in all the world, can also say, "and he is my God too. He is my God, and he is as much my God if I am the meanest, most obscure, and weakest of his people, as he would be my God if I were able, like Paul, to evangelize the nations." It is, to me, delightful to think that my God is Paul's God, because, you see, Paul intended this; he meant to say, "You see, dear brethren, my God has supplied all my wants; and as he is your God, he will supply yours." I have been in the Roman dungeon in which Paul is said to have been confined, and a comfortless prison indeed it is. First of all you descend into a vaulted chamber, into which no light ever comes except through a little round hole in the roof; and then, in the middle of the floor of that den, there is another opening, through which the prisoner was let down into a second and lower dungeon, in which no fresh air or light could possibly come to him. Paul was probably confined there. The dungeon of the Praetorium in which he was certainly immured is not much better. Paul would have been left well nigh to starve there, but for those good people at Philippi. I should not wonder but what Lydia was at the bottom of this kind movement, or else the jailor. They said, "We must not let the good apostle starve;" and so they made up a contribution, and send him what he wanted; and when Paul received it he said, "My God has taken care of me. I cannot make tents here in this dark place so as to earn my own living, but my Master still supplies my need; and even so, when you are in straits, will he supply you."

“My God.” It has often been sweet to me, when I have thought of my orphan children, and money has not come in, to remember Mr. Müller’s God, and how he always supplied the children at Bristol. His God is my God, and I rest upon him. When you turn over the pages of Scripture, and read of men who were in sore trouble, and were helped, you may say, “Here is Abraham, he was blessed in all this, and Abraham’s God will supply all my need, for he is my God. I read of Elijah, that the ravens fed him; I have Elijah’s God, and he can command the ravens to feed me if he pleases.” The God of the prophets, the God of the apostle, the God of all the saints that have gone before us, “this God is our God for ever and ever.” It seems to be thought by some that God will not work now as he used to die. “Oh, if we had lived in miraculous times,” they say, “then we could have trusted him! Then there was manifest evidence of God’s existence, for he pushed aside the laws of nature, and wrought for the fulfillment of his promises to his people.” Yet that was a rather coarser mode of working than the present one, for now the Lord produces the same results without the violation of the laws of nature. It is a great fact that, without the disturbance of a single law of nature, prayer becomes effectual with God; and God being enquired of by his people to do it for them, does fulfill his promise, and supply their needs. Using means of various kinds, he still gives his people all things necessary for this life and godliness. Without a miracle, he works great wonders of loving care, and he will continue so to do.

Beloved, is the God of Paul your God? Do you regard him as such? It is not every man who worships Paul’s God. It is not every professing Christian who really knows the Lord at all, for some invent a deity such as they fancy God ought to be. The God of Paul is the God of the Old and New Testament,-such a God as we find there. Do you trust such a God? Can you rest upon him?”

There are such severe judgments mentioned in Scripture.” Yes, do you quarrel with them? Then you cast him off; but if, instead thereof, you feel, “I cannot understand thee, O my God, nor do I think I ever shall, but it is not for me, a child, to measure the infinite God, or to arraign thee at my bar, and say to thee, ’Thus shouldst thou have done, and thus oughtest thou not to have done.’ Thou sayest, ’ Such am I,’ and I answer, ’ Such as thou art, I love thee, and I cast myself upon thee, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of thy servant Paul. Thou art my God, and I will rest upon thee.’“ Very well, then, he will “supply all your need, according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.” Just think of that for a minute.

If he will supply you, you will be supplied indeed, for God is infinite in capacity. He is indefinitely wise as to the manner of his actions; and infinitely powerful as to the acts themselves. He never sleeps nor tires; he is never absent from any place, but is always ready to help. Your needs come, perhaps, at very unexpected times; they may occur in the midnight of despondency or in the noonday of delight, but God is ever near to supply the surprising need. He is everywhere present and everywhere omnipotent, and he can supply all your need, in every place, at every time, to the fullest degree.

“Remember that Omnipotence has servants everywhere;”- and that, whenever God wishes to send you aid, he can do it without pausing to ask, “How shall it be done?” He has but to will it, and all the powers of heaven and earth are subservient to your necessity. With such a Helper, what cause have you to doubt?

III. The next point in the text is, A Great Supply. “My God shall supply all your need.”

Sometimes, we lose a good deal of the meaning of Scripture through the translation; in fact, nothing ever does gain by translation except a bishop. The present passage might be rendered thus “My God will fill to the full all your need.” The illustration which will best explain the meaning is that of the woman whose children were to be sold by her creditor to pay the debts of her late husband. She had nothing to call her own except some empty oil-jars, and the prophet bade her set these in order, and bring the little oil which still remained in the cruse. She did so, and he then said to her, “Go among your neighbors, and borrow empty vessels, not a few.” She went from one to another till she had filled her room full of these empty vessels, and then the prophet said, “Pour out.” She began to pour out from her almost empty cruse; and, to her surprise, it filled her largest oil-jar. She went to another, and filled that, and then another and another. She kept on filling all the oil-jars, till at last she said to the prophet, “there is not a vessel more.” Then the oil stayed, but not till then. So will it be with your needs. You were frightened at having so many needs just now, were you not? But now be pleased to think you have them, for they are just so many empty vessels to be filled. If the woman had borrowed only a few jars, she could not have received much oil; but the more empty vessels she had, the more oil she obtained. So, the more wants and the more needs you have if you bring them to God, so much the better, for he will fill them all to the brim, and you may be thankful that there are so many to be filled. When you have no more wants, (but oh, when will that be?) then the supply will be stayed, but not till then.

How gloriously God gives to his people! We wanted pardon once: he washed us, and he made us whiter than snow. We wanted clothing, for we were naked. What did he do? Give us some rough dress or other? Oh, no! but he said, “Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him.” It was a fortunate thing for the prodigal that, his clothes were all in rags, for then he needed raiment, and the best robe was brought forth. It is a grand thing to be sensible of spiritual needs, for they will all be supplied. A conscious want in the sight of God,-what is it but a prevalent request for a new mercy? We have sometimes asked him to comfort us, for we were very low; but

when the Lord has comforted us, he has so filled us with delight that we have been inclined to cry with the old Scotch divine, “Hold, Lord, hold! It is enough. I cannot bear more joy. Remember I am only an earthen vessel.” We, in relieving the poor, generally give no more than we can help, but our God does not stop to count his favors, he gives like a king. He pours water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground.

IV. We must pass on to the next thought, and consider for a minute or two The Great Resources out of which this supply is to come: “My God shall supply all your need, according to his riches in glory.”

The preacher may sit down now, for he cannot compass this part of the text. God’s riches in glory are beyond all thought.

Consider the riches of God in nature; who shall count his treasures? Get away into the forests; travel on league after league among the trees which cast their ample shade for no man’s pleasure, but only for the Lord. Mark on lone mountain-side and far-reaching plain the myriads of flowers whose perfume is for God alone. What wealth each spring and summer is created in the boundless estates of the great King! Observe the vast amount of animal and insect life which crowds the land with the riches of divine wisdom, for “the earth is the Lord’s, and the fullness thereof.” Look towards the sea; think of those shoals of fish, so countless that, when only the fringe of them is touched by our fishermen, they find enough food to supply a nation. Mark, too, the sunken treasures of the ocean, which no hand gathereth but that of the Eternal. If you would see the wealth of the Creator, cast your eye to the stars; tell ye their numbers if ye can. Astronomy has enlarged our vision, and made us look upon this world as a mere speck compared with innumerable other worlds that God has made; and it has told us that, probably, all the myriads of worlds that we can see with the telescope are a mere fraction of the countless orbs which tenant infinite space. Vast are God’s riches in nature. It needs a Milton to sing, as he sang in Paradise Lost, the riches of the creating God.

The riches of God in providence are equally without bound. He saith to this creature, “Go,” and he goeth, and to another, “Do this,” and he doeth it, for all things do his bidding. Think of the wealth of God in grace. There nature and providence stand eclipsed, for we have the fountain of eternal love, the gift of an infinite sacrifice, the pouring out of the blood of his own dear Son, and the covenant of grace in which the smallest blessing is infinite in value. The riches of his grace! “God is rich in mercy,”-rich in patience, love, power, kindness, rich beyond all conception.

Now your needs shall be supplied according to the riches of nature, and the riches of providence, and the riches of grace; but this is not all; the apostle chooses a higher style, and writes “according to his riches in glory.” Ah, we have never seen God in glory! That were a sight our eyes could none at present behold. Christ in his glory, when transfigured upon earth, was too resplendent a spectacle even for the tutored eyes of Peter, and James, and John.

“At the too-transporting light,”- darkness rushed upon them, and they were as men that slept What God is in his glory do ye know, ye angels? Does he not veil his face even from you lest, in the excessive brightness of his essence, even you should be consumed? Who amongst all his creatures can tell the riches of his glory, when even the heavens are not pure in his sight, and he charges his angels with folly?

“His riches in glory.” It means not only the riches of what he has done, but the riches of what he could do; for if he has made hosts of worlds, he could make as many myriads more, and then have but begun. The possibilities of God omnipotent, who shall reckon? But the Lord shall supply all your need according to such glorious possibilities. When a great king gives according to his, riches, then he does not measure out stinted alms to beggars, but he gives like a king, as we say; and if it be some grand festival day, and the king is in his state array, his largesse is on a noble scale. Now, when God is in his glory, bethink you, if you can, what must be the largesse that he distributes,-what the treasures that he brings forth for his own beloved! Now, “according to his riches in glory,” he will supply all your needs. After that, dare you despond? O soul, what insanity is unbelief? What flagrant blasphemy is doubt of the love of God! He must bless us; and, blessed by him, we must be blest indeed. If he is to supply our needs “according to his riches in glory,” they will be supplied to the full.

V. Now let us close our meditation by considering The Glorious Channel by which these needs are to be supplied: “According to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”

You shall have all your soul’s wants satisfied, but you must go to Christ for everything. “By Christ Jesus.” That is the fountainhead where the living waters well up. You are not to keep your wants supplied by your own care and fretfulness. “Consider the lilies, how they grow.” You are to be enriched “by Christ Jesus.” You are not to have your spiritual wants supplied by going to Moses, and working and toiling as if you were your own saviour, but by faith in Christ Jesus. Those who will not go to Christ Jesus must go without grace, for God will give them nothing in the way of grace except through his Son. Those who go to Jesus the most shall oftenest taste of his abundance, for through him all blessings come. My advice to myself and to you is that we abide in him; for,

since that is the way by which the blessing comes, we had better abide in it. We read of Ishmael that he was sent into the wilderness with a bottle, but Isaac dwelt by the well Lahai-roi, and it is wise for us to dwell by the well Christ Jesus, and never trust to the bottles of our own strength. If you wander from Christ Jesus, brother, you depart from the center of bliss.

All this year I pray that you may abide by the well of this text. Draw from it. Are you very thirsty? Draw from it, for it is full; and when you plead this promise, the Lord will supply all your need. Do not cease receiving from God for a minute. Let not your unbelief hinder the Lord's bounty, but cling to this promise, "My God shall supply all your need, according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus." I know not how to wish "you a greater blessing. If you are enabled by the Holy Spirit to realize it, you will enjoy what I earnestly wish for you, namely,- A Happy New Year.

Sermon Notes on

Rejoice in the Lord alway:
and again I say, Rejoice.
Philippians 4:4 (note)

JOY drives out discord. See how our text follows as a remedy upon a case of disagreement in the church (verses 1-2).

Joy helps against the trials of life. Hence, it is mentioned as a preparation for the rest of faith, which is prescribed in verse 6.

I. THE GRACE COMMANDED. "Rejoice."

1. It is delightful. Our soul's jubilee has come when joy enters.

2. It is demonstrative. It is more than peace; it sparkles, shines, sings. Why should it not? Joy is a bird. Let it fly in the open heavens, and let its music be heard of all men.

3. It is stimulating and urges its possessor to brave deeds.

4. It is influential for good. Sinners are attracted to Jesus by the joy of saints. More flies are caught with a spoonful of honey than with a barrel of vinegar.

5. It is contagious. Others are gladdened by our rejoicing.

6. It is commanded. It is not left optional, but made imperative.

We are as much commanded to rejoice as to keep the Sabbath.

It is commanded because joy makes us like God.

It is commanded because it is for our profit.

It is commanded because it is good for others.

II. THE JOY DISCRIMINATED. "In the Lord."

1. As to sphere: "in the Lord." This is that sacred circle wherein a Christian's life should be always spent.

2. As to object: "in the Lord."

We should rejoice in the Lord God, Father, Son, and Spirit. We should rejoice in the Lord Jesus, dead, risen, etc.

Not in temporals, personal, political, or pecuniary.

Nor in special privileges, which involve greater responsibility.

Nor even in religious successes. "In this rejoice not, that the devils are subject unto you through my word, but rather rejoice that your names are written in heaven" (Luke 10:20).

Nor in self and its doings (Philippians 3:3 - note).

III. THE TIME APPOINTED. "Always."

1. When you cannot rejoice in any other, rejoice in God.

2. When you can rejoice in other things, sanctify all with joy in God.

3. When you have not before rejoiced, begin at once.

4. When you have long rejoiced, do not cease for a moment.

5. When others are with you, lead them in this direction.

6. When you are alone, enjoy to the full this rejoicing.

IV. THE EMPHASIS LAID ON THE COMMAND. "Again I say, Rejoice."

Paul repeats his exhortation—

1. To show his love to them. He is intensely anxious that they should share his joy.

2. To suggest the difficulty of continual joy. He twice commands, because we are slow to obey.

3. To assert the possibility of it. After second thoughts, he feels that he may fitly repeat the exhortation.

4. To impress the importance of the duty. Whatever else you forget, remember this: Be sure to rejoice.

5. To allow of special personal testimony. "Again I say, Rejoice." Paul rejoiced. He was habitually a happy man. This epistle to the Philippians is peculiarly joyous.

Let us look it through. The apostle is joyful throughout—

- He sweetens prayer with joy (Philippians 1:4 - note).
- He rejoices that Christ is preached (Philippians 1:18 - note).
- He wished to live to gladden the church (Philippians 1:25 -note).
- To see the members like-minded was his joy (Philippians 2:2 - note).
- It was his joy that he should not run in vain (Philippians 2:16 - note).
- His farewell to them was, "Rejoice in the Lord" (Philippians 3:1 - note).
- He speaks of those who rejoice in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:3 - note).
- He calls his converts his joy and crown (Philippians 4:1 - note).
- He expresses his joy in their kindness (see notes Philippians 4:4
- , 4:10, 4:18).

To all our friends, let us use this as a blessing: "Rejoice in the Lord."

This is only a choicer way of saying, Be happy; fare-you-well.

Fare ye well, and if for ever,
Still forever fare ye well.

Joy-Bells

It is not an indifferent thing to rejoice, or not to rejoice; but we are commanded to rejoice, to show that we break a commandment if we rejoice not. Oh, what a comfort is this, when the Comforter himself shall command us to rejoice! God was wont to say, Repent, and not rejoice, because men rejoice too much; but God here commandeth to rejoice, as though some men did not rejoice enough: therefore you must understand to whom he speaketh. In Psalm 149:5, it is said, "Let the saints be glad? not, let the wicked be glad. And, in Isa. 40:1, he saith, "Comfort my people," not, comfort mine enemies, showing to whom this commandment of Paul is sent, "Rejoice evermore." — Henry Smith

The thing whereunto he exhorteth, as ye see, is to rejoice; a thing which the sensual man can quickly lay hold on, who loves to rejoice, and to cheer himself in the days of his flesh; which yet might now seem unreasonable to the Philippians, who lived in the midst of a naughty and crooked nation, by whom they were even hated for the truth's sake which they professed. Mark, therefore, wherein the apostle would they should rejoice, namely, in the Lord; and here the sensual man, that haply would catch hold when it is said, Rejoice, by-and-by when it is added, in the Lord, will let go his hold. But they that, by reason of the billows and waves of the troublesome sea of this world, cannot brook the speech when it is said, Rejoice, are to lay sure holdfast upon it when it is added, Rejoice in the Lord; which holdfast once taken, that they might for ever keep it sure, in the third place it is added, Rejoice in the Lord alway, to note the constancy that should be in Christian joy. — Henry Airay

Another note to distinguish this joy in the Lord from all other joys is the fullness and exuberancy of it, for it is more joy than if corn and wine and oil increased. Else what needed the apostle, having said, "Rejoice in the Lord always," to add, "and again I say, Rejoice"? What can be more than always, but still adding to the fullness of our joy, till our cup do overflow?

Upon working days, rejoice in the Lord who giveth thee strength to labor and feedeth thee with the labor of thy hands. On holidays, rejoice in the Lord who feasteth thee with the marrow and fatness of his house. In plenty, rejoice again and again, because the Lord giveth. In want, rejoice because the Lord taketh away, and as it pleaseth the Lord, so come things to pass. — Edward Marbury

The calendar of the sinner has only a few days in the year marked as festival days; but every day of the Christian's calendar is marked by the hand of God as a day of rejoicing. — Anonymous

'Tis impious in a good man to be sad.— Edward Young

Napoleon, when sent to Elba, adopted, in proud defiance of his fate, the motto, "Ubicunque felix." It was not true in his case, but the Christian may be truly "happy everywhere" and always.

EXPOSITION OF PHILIPPIANS
By C H Spurgeon

PHILIPPIANS 1

Philippians 1:1-7

This Epistle was written by Paul when he was in prison, with iron fetters about his wrists; yet there is no iron in the Epistle. It is full of light, life, love, and joy, blended with traces of sorrow, yet with a holy delight that rises above his grief.

Philippians 1:14 And many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

Verses 12-14: Notice the beautiful self-forgetfulness of the apostle Paul. So long as the, gospel could be more widely published, he did not mind where he was, or what he suffered. He was able to witness for Christ among the Praetorian guards, who had the charge of the prison where he was confined, and who also, in their turn, were on duty in Caesar's palace; so Paul says that, through his being in bonds there, the particulars concerning his imprisonment were talked about even in the imperial palace, and by that means the gospel was made known to many in Caesar's household. Then, in addition, other brethren, who might perhaps have felt compelled to be quiet in his presence, finding that their leader was removed from them, waxed confident to come out and" speak the word without fear." The same sort of thing has often happened since. You have sometimes seen a widely-spreading oak tree cut down, and you have missed its grateful shadow; yet, afterwards, you have discovered that many little trees, which would have, been dwarfed beneath its shade, have grown more rapidly in its absence; and, in like manner, the removal of some eminent servant of the Lord Jesus Christ has frequently made room for others to spring up, and more than fill his place.

Philippians 1:15-19

It is much to be desired that all who preach Christ should preach in a right spirit; but even if they do not, let us be glad that Christ is preached anyhow, Even though it is only a portion of the gospel that is proclaimed, and there is much mixed with it from which we greatly differ, yet, if Christ is preached, his gospel will win its own way, and work out his great purposes of love and mercy, You have, perhaps, sometimes seen a little fire kindled among the dead autumn leaves which are dank and lamp; and you have noticed that, despite, all the smoke, the fire has continued to live and burn. So is it with the eternal truth of God. Notwithstanding all the error with which it is often damped, and almost smothered, it will live, and the truth will conquer the error which is piled upon it. So Paul says, "I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ,"—

Philippians 1:20 According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death.

Philippians 1:21 For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

Again I bid you remark Paul's devotion and self-forgetfulness. It seems to be a matter of no choice with him

whether he serves God in life or glorifies him in death. The emblem of the American Baptist Missionary Union is an ox standing between a plough and an altar, with the motto, “Ready for either,”—Ready to spend and be spent in labor, or to be a sacrifice, whichever the Lord pleases.

“To me to live is Christ.” If he lived, he lived to know more of Christ studying his person, and learning by his happy experience so that he increased in his knowledge of his Lord and Savior. If he lived, he lived to imitate Christ more closely, becoming more and more conformed to his image. If he lived, he lived to make Christ more and more known to others, and to enjoy Christ more himself. In these four senses, he might well say, “For to me to live is Christ,” — to know Christ more, to imitate Christ more, to preach Christ more, and to enjoy Christ more.

“And to die is gain,” because death, he felt, would free him from all sin and from all doubts as to his state in the present and the future. It would be gain to him, for then he would no longer be tossed upon the stormy sea, but he would be safe upon the land whither he was bound. It would be gain to him, for then he would be free from all temptations both from within and from without. It would be gain to him, for then he would be delivered from all his enemies; there would be no cruel Nero, no blaspheming Jews, no false brethren then. It would be gain to him, for then he would be delivered from all suffering, there would be no more shipwrecks, no more being beaten with rods, or being stoned, for him then. Dying, too, would be gain for him, for he would then be free from all fear of death; and having once died, he would die no more for ever. It would be gain to him, for he would find in heaven better and more perfect friends than he would leave behind on earth; and he would find, above all, his Savior, and be a partaker of his glory. This is a wide subject, and the more we think over it, the more sweetness shall we get out of it.

Philippians 1:22 But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot not.

That is a very different thing from living to the flesh. He lived to work for Christ, and to see souls saved as the fruit of his labor.

Philippians 1:23 For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better:

There were the two currents flowing in opposite directions. The apostle seemed to hear two voices speaking to him; one of them said, “Live, and you will gather the fruit of your labor, you will see sinners saved, churches established, and the kingdom of Christ extended in the earth.” The other said, “Die, and you will be with Christ;” so he knew not which to choose.

Philippians 1:24 Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you.

Philippians 1:25 And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all for your furtherance and joy of faith;

The apostle desired to die, yet he was willing to live. Death would have been gain to him, yet he would endure the loss of living if he might thereby benefit others. Let us also always prefer the welfare of others before our own, and care rather to serve others than to make ourselves never so happy.

Philippians 1:26 That your rejoicing may be more abundant in Jesus Christ for me by my coming to you again.

Philippians 1:27 Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel;

Now the apostle gives these saints at Philippi a loving exhortation: — The unity of the church is of the utmost importance. When there is a walls of brotherly love, the perfect bond is lost; and as a bundle of rods, when once the binding cord is cut, becomes merely a number of weak and single twigs, so is it with a divided church. May we always be kept in one holy bond of perfect union with each other!

What a happy church is that where the members all “stand fast in one spirit,” and where they are all “with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel;—not striving with each other, but all fighting for the faith once for all delivered to the saints!

Philippians 1:28 And in nothing terrified by your adversaries: which is to them an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that of God.

They give you up as lost because they cannot frighten you; they take it as a token of your perdition that you are not terrified by them, and it is so to them; yet, to you, the peacefulness with which you can endure slander

and persecution should be a token of your salvation.

"Away with them! Away with them!" cried the heathen; "those who are not ashamed to acknowledge the crucified Christ are only worthy of perdition." But of what was their courage a token to themselves?

For when saints can bear fierce persecution without flinching it is an evident sign that they are saved by the grace of God.

Philippians 1:29 For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake;

Which is a great gift. **to suffer for his sake;** Which is a still greater gift.

What an honor this is to be conferred upon any follower of Christ,—"not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake"! It is not every Christian who receives this mark of honor. There are some believers who have peculiarly tender places in their hearts, and who are wounded and gashed by the unkind remarks of those who love them not because they love the Lord Jesus Christ. To you, my brother, my sister, it is given—and you may well rejoice in such a gift,—"not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake."

Philippians 1:30 Having the same conflict which ye saw in me, and now hear to be in me.

"The same agony" it is in the Greek, as if every Christian must, in his measure, go through the same agony through which the apostle went, striving and wrestling against sin, groaning under its burden, agonising to be delivered from it and laboring to bring others out of its power.

PHILIPPIANS 2

Philippians 2:1 If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies,

Paul did not mean to doubt that there is "any consolation in Christ, any comfort of love, any fellowship of the Spirit, any bowels and mercies," for no one knew better than he did how those blessings abound to them that are in Christ Jesus. He put it by way of argument. If there be consolation in Christ, since there is consolation in Christ, since there is comfort of love, since there is fellowship of the Spirit, be one in Christ; be not divided; love one another: "be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind."

Philippians 2:2 Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.

He knew that these saints at Philippi loved him. They had sent once and again to relieve his necessities, so he pleaded with them, by their love to him, to love each other. He does as much as say, "If you really do love me, if it is not a sham, if you have any sympathy with me, and with my labors and sufferings, if you really have the same spirit that burns in my breast, make my heart full of joy by clinging to one another, by being like-minded, 'having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.'"

Philippians 2:3 Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.

This would be a good motto for those who are intending to build new places of worship. Let them not be built through strife, because of a squabble among the people of God, but make sure that all concerned are actuated by right motives, and seeking only the glory of God. Then, sometimes, if one gives a guinea, another feels that he must give two so as to excel him; this is giving out of vainglory. Let nothing be done in this way, but as unto the Lord, and as in his sight, let us do all our works, and give all our gifts.

"Nothing": never give to exceed other givers. Never preach that you may be a better preacher than anybody else; never work in the Sunday-school with the idea of being thought a very successful teacher. "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory."

But in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.

There is some point in which your friend excels you. Notice that rather than the point in which you excel him. Try to give him the higher seat; seek yourself to take the lowest room.

Philippians 2:4 Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.

Have a large heart, so that, though you care for yourself in spiritual things, and desire your own sod-prosperity, you may have the same desire for every other Christian man or woman.

Consider how you can help others, and in what way you can prosper them both in temporal things and in spiritual. You are members of a body, so one member is not to think for itself alone, the unity of the whole body requires that every separate and distinct part of it should be in harmony with the whole.

Philippians 2:1–4. If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, fulfill ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, be one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things,— Do not obey the world's maxim "Take care of Number One." "Look not every man on his own things,"—

Philippians 2:5 Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:

What an example we have set before us in the Lord Jesus Christ! We are to have the mind of Christ; and that in the most Christly way, for here we have Christ set out to the life.

Philippians 2:6 Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God:

For he was equal with God.

Philippians 2:7 But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men:

and of all the reverence paid to him by the holy spirits around the throne.

Philippians 2:8 And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

He had not descended low enough yet, though he had come down all the way from the Godhead to our manhood: "he humbled himself."

What a cruel and ignominious death for the Son of God to suffer! Did he lose anything by all this wondrous condescension? Will you lose anything by any dishonor that may come upon you for Christ's sake, for the truth's sake? No; listen to what followed our Savior's humiliation:—

He humbled himself, so be you not unwilling to humble yourself. Lower than the cross Christ could not go, his death was one of such extreme ignominy that he could not have been more disgraced and degraded. Be you willing to take the lowest place in the Church of God, and to render the humblest service, count it an honor to be allowed to wash the saints feet. Be humble in mind; nothing is lost by cherishing this spirit, for see how Jesus Christ was honored in the end.

Philippians 2:9 Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name:

He stooped, who can tell how low? He was raised, who shall tell how high? "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him."

He threw away his name; he emptied himself of his reputation. How high is his reputation now! How glorious is the name that God hath given him as the reward of his redemptive work!

Philippians 2:10 That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth;

Philippians 2:11 And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Now is he higher than the highest. Now every one must confess his divinity. With shame and terror, his adversaries shall bow before him; with delight and humble adoration, his friends shall own him Lord of all: "that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." See how the greatest glory of Christ is the glory of the Father. He never desired any other glory but that. The highest honor you can ever have, O child of God, is to bring honor to your Father who is in heaven. Do you not think so? I know you do.

Some foolish and superstitious persons make this passage a pretext for bowing their heads at the name of Jesus whenever it is mentioned. Nothing can be more senseless, because the passage means no such thing.

What we are taught here is the great truth that Jesus Christ, though once he stooped to the lowest shame, is now exalted to the very highest glory, and even the devils in hell are compelled to own the might of his power. We are also to learn from this passage that the way to ascend is to descend. He who would be chief must be willing to be the servant of all. The King of kings was the Servant of servants; and if you would be crowned with honor by-and-by, you must be willing to be despised and rejected of men now. The Lord give us this gracious humbleness of mind, for Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

Philippians 2:12 Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

Get out of self. Work out your salvation from pride, from vainglory, from disputations and strife.

Philippians 2:13 For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.

You may very well work out what God works in. If he does not work it in, you will never work it out; but while he works within your spirit both to will and to do, you may safely go on to will and to do; for your willing and your doing will produce lowliness of spirit, and unity of heart with your brethren.

In a certain sense, the salvation of every person who believes in Christ is complete, and complete without any working out on his part, seeing that "it is finished," and we are complete in Jesus. Observe that there are two parts of our salvation, the one complete, the other as yet incomplete, though guaranteed to be brought to perfection. The first part of our salvation consists of a work for us; the second, of a work in us. The work for us is perfect-none can add thereunto. Jesus Christ our Lord has offered a complete atonement for all the offenses of his people. He took his people into union with himself, and by that union they became entitled to all the merit of his righteousness; they became partakers of his everlasting life, and inheritors of his glory. Saints are therefore saved completely so far as substitutionary work is concerned. Such was the meaning of those majestic death-words of our Lord, "It is finished." He had finished transgression, made an end of sin, and brought in everlasting righteousness, and thus perfected for ever them that are set apart. Now with the work of Christ we cannot intermeddle; we are never told to work that out, but to receive it by faith. The blessing comes "to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly." Justification is not at all by human effort, but by the free gift of God. The second part of salvation consists of a work in us-this is the operation of God the Holy Ghost. As many as were redeemed by the blood of Jesus, are also in due time renewed in the spirit of their minds. The Holy Ghost in regeneration descends into a man, and creates in him a new nature; he does not destroy the old that remains still to be battled with, and to be overcome. Though the nature which the Spirit implants is perfect in its kind and in its degree, yet it is not perfect in its development. It is a seed which needs to work itself out into a tree, it is an infant which requires to grow into the stature of a perfect man; the new nature has in it all the elements of entire perfection, but it needs to be expanded, brought out, to use the words of the text, wrought out with fear and trembling. God having first worked it in, it becomes the business of the Christian life to work out the secret inner principle till it permeates the entire system, till it overcomes the old nature, till it, in fact, utterly destroys inbred corruption, and reigns supreme in the man's every part; as it shall do when the Lord takes us to dwell with himself for ever. Understand then, it is not at all to the mediatorial work of Christ, it is not at all with regard to the pardon of our sins, or the justification of our persons that Paul speaks, but only with regard to our inner spiritual life. He says of that, "Work it out with fear and trembling. For it is God that worketh in you."

Philippians 2:14 Do all things without murmurings and disputings:

Do not say, "You give me too much to do; you always give me the hard work; you put me in the obscure corner." No, no; "do all things without murmurings." And do not begin fighting over a holy work; for, if you do, you spoil it in the very beginning, and how can you then hope for a blessing upon it? "Do all things without murmurings and disputings."

Philippians 2:15 That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world;

None finding fault with you, and you not finding fault with others; neither harming nor harmed: "blameless and harmless."

The sons of God, without rebuke,

So that men cannot rebuke you, and will have to invent a lie before they can do it; and even then the falsehood is too palpable to have any force in it: "without rebuke."

In the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world;

You cannot straighten them; but you can shine. They would destroy you if they could; but all you have to do is to shine. If Christian men would give more attention to their shining, and pay less attention to the crooked and perverse generation, much more would come of it. But now we are advised to “keep abreast of the times,” and to “catch the spirit of the age.” If I could ever catch that spirit, I would hurl it into the bottomless abyss; for it is a spirit that is antagonistic to Christ in all respects. We are just to keep clear of all that, and “shine as lights in the world.”

Philippians 2:16 Holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain.

You are to hold forth the Word of life as men hold forth a torch. Your shining is largely to consist in holding forth the Word of life.

God’s ministers cannot bear the thought of having labored in vain; and yet if some of us were to die, what would remain of all we have done? I charge you, brethren, to think of what your life-work has been hitherto. Will it remain? Will it abide? Will it stand the test of your own departure? Ah, if you have any fear about it, you may well go to God in prayer, and cry, “Establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands, establish thou it.” Paul cared much about God’s work; but he did not trouble about himself.

Philippians 2:17 Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all.

If he might be poured forth as a drink-offering on their behalf, or offered up as a whole burnt-offering in the service of the Savior, he would be glad. He could not bear to have lived in vain; but to spend his life for the glory of his Lord, would be ever a joy to him.

Philippians 2:18 For the same cause also do ye joy, and rejoice with me.

To live and to die for Jesus Christ, with the blessing of the Father resting upon us, is a matter for us to joy in unitedly and continually. God help us so to do!

PHILIPPIANS 3

Philippians 3:1. Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you, to me indeed is not grievous, but for you it is safe.

Let this be the end of everything; before you get to the end of it, and when you do get to the end of it, “rejoice in the Lord.” It is incumbent upon us, as Christians, to rise out of our despondencies. Joy should be the normal state of the Christian. What a happy religion is ours in which it is a duty to be happy! “Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord.”

When you get to “finally,” when you are very near the end of your journey, still “rejoice in the Lord.” “Finally,” says Paul, as if this was the end of his epistle, the conclusion of all his teaching: “Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord.” But never do it finally, never come to an end of it. Rejoice in the Lord, and yet again rejoice, and yet again rejoice; and as long as you live, rejoice in the Lord.

As much as to say, “If this were the last sentence that I should write to you, I would say, Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord.’ It is your privilege, it is your duty, to rejoice in God; — not in your health, your wealth, your children, your prosperity, but in the Lord.” There is the unchanging and unbounded source of joy. It will do you no harm to rejoice in the Lord; the more you rejoice in him, the more spiritually-minded will you become. “Finally, my brethren.” That is, even to the end, not with you the bitter end; but even to the end of life, rejoice in the Lord. Make this the finis of everything, the end of every day, the end of every year, the end of life. “Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord.” Blessed is that religion in which it is a duty to be happy.

Some hearers are like the Athenian academicians; they want continually to hear something new. The apostle says, “To have the same things written to you, is safe.” So is it for you, dear friends; to have the same gospel, the same Jesus, the same Holy Spirit, made known to you, is safe. New doctrine is dangerous doctrine.

Saying the same thing over and over again is Safe, for your minds do not catch the truth at the first hearing, and your memories are slippery.

To go over the same old truths again and again, to proclaim the same precepts, and teach the same doctrines, is not grievous to us, and it is safe for you to hear these things again and again. If they have not made their due impression upon you already, perhaps they will do so when they are repeated in your hearing. At any rate it is safe for you to hear or read over and over again the old, old story with which you are already familiar.

Philippians 3:2. **Beware of dogs, —**

Contentious persons, — persons of coarse and corrupt habits: “Beware of dogs,” — They are like to dogs. If they fawn upon you, they will bemire you, if they do not bite you.

Men of a doggish, captious, selfish spirit. In Paul’s day, there were some who were called Cynics, that is to say, dogs: “Beware of dogs,” —

Beware of evil workers,

However prettily they may talk, if they are workers of evil, beware of them.” By their fruits ye shall know them.” Their speech may be clever, but if their lips be unclean, beware of them.

Beware of the concision.

By which Paul meant those Jews who made a great point of circumcision; he calls them here “the cutters”, for they mangled and cut the Church of God in pieces: “Beware of the concision.”

Beware of the cutters off, those who excommunicate and cut off others because they do not happen quite to agree with them in certain rites and ceremonies.

There were some who bad confidence in circumcision, who greatly troubled Paul. The apostle says that they were “the concision”, the cutters-off, of whom he would have the Philippians beware.

Philippians 3:3 For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.

These are three marks of the true Israel of God; have you all of them,-worshipping God in the spirit, rejoicing in Christ Jesus, and having no confidence in the flesh?

This is the real circumcision, which is of the spirit, and not of the flesh. The men who have abandoned all confidence in themselves, the men who have come to rely upon Christ alone, the men who “rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh,” those who care not for outward rites and ceremonies, but who worship God in the spirit, — these are the true circumcision.

Philippians 3:4 Though I might also have confidence in the flesh.

“If any man might trust in outward religion, I might,” said Paul; yet he was the very man who would not do so, and who warned others against doing it.

If any man might have had confidence in the flesh, truly Paul might.

If anybody might, Paul might. If birth, if education, or if external religiousness could have saved anybody in the world, it would have saved Saul of Tarsus.

Philippians 3:5 If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: circumcised the eight day,

So that, if anybody could have boasted of what he was by birth, what he was by profession, what he was by the display of religious zeal, Paul could have boasted as boldly as anyone could, for in all those respects he was second to nobody. You know that it is a very easy thing, or it ought to be a very easy thing, for some people to be humble, for they have nothing to be proud of, but here is a man who had much of which he might have been proud. According to the letter of the law, he was a diamond of the first water; yet see what a different verdict he gives after grace has opened his eyes.

So that I do not know what more he could have had. If a Jew had tried to select a man who had something to glory in, he could not have picked any man to stand in the front of Paul. He was truly a Jew, he had received the initiatory rite, and on the right day. He was born of the innermost tribe, the tribe of Benjamin, in whose country stood the temple itself. He was O, Pharisee, who pushed the law to the extreme; he tithed his mint and his cummin. Nobody could have anything to glory in which Paul had not.

circumcised the eighth day

The ritual was observed even to the hour in his case.

Of the stock of Israel

Not an Edomite or a Samaritan, but “of the stock of Israel,” and of the very center of that stock.

Of the tribe of Benjamin

Which remained with Judah, faithful, long after the ten tribes had gone aside.

An Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee

That is, one who observed all the minutiae and details of the ceremonial law,, and a good deal more, — the traditions of the elders which hung like moss about the old stone of Jewish ceremonialism. Paul had observed all that.

Philippians 3:6. Concerning zeal, persecuting the church!

Be was most zealous in the cause that he thought right. Bitterly, cruelly, even to the death, did he persecute the believers in Jesus.

Touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

Paul had been kept from the vices into which many fell. In his young days, he had been pure; and all his days, he had been upright and sincere. As far as he knew, to the best of his light, he had observed the law of God.

In another place, he calls himself the chief of sinners; and so he was, because he persecuted the Church of God; but, in another sense, I may say of him that there is no man who stood so good a chance of being justified by works as Paul did, if there could have been any justification in that way.

Philippians 3:7 But what things were gain, to me, those I counted loss for Christ.

So that, when we come to Christ, whatever we have to trust to, we must put away. We must write it on the other side of the ledger. We bad entered it as a gain; now we must set it down as a loss; it is of no value whatsoever, it is a loss if it shall tempt us to trust any less in Christ.

His faith in Jesus reversed all his former estimates, ’so that his gains he counted to be losses. He thought it so much the worse, concerning zeal, to have persecuted the church, and so much to his injury to have imagined that he was blameless in the presence of God.

Philippians 3:8 Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ,

Those are sweet words, “my Lord.” Remember how Thomas cried, in ecstasy, “My Lord and my God.” Paul, by faith putting his finger into the prints of the nails, says, “My Lord.”

Oh, what a precious place to be found in, “in him,” trusting in him, hidden away in him, a member of his body, as it were, losing myself in him!

Everything else must go in order to secure that. Paul thinks that to be righteous by faith is infinitely better than all the righteousness that can come by works and ceremonies. He therefore utterly despises that which he once thought to be more precious that gold; and he takes possession of, as his greatest treasure, that which he once trampled in the mire. Now his great desire is —

He had every opportunity of advancement. He was a fine scholar, and might have reached the highest degree in connection with the Sanhedrim and the synagogue; but he thought nothing of all that, he threw it all away as worthless, and declared that this was his ambition: “That I may win Christ,”

The very high value that the apostle Paul set upon the Savior, is most palpable, when he speaks of winning him. This shows that the Savior held the same place in Paul’s esteem as the crown did in the esteem of the runner at the Olympic games. To gain that crown, the competitor strained every nerve and sinew, feeling as though he were content to drop down dead at the goal if he might but win it. Paul felt that were he to run with all his might, if that, were the way of winning Christ, were he to strain soul and body to win him, he would be well worth the effort. He shows his value of Christ by speaking of him as the prize he panted to win. He uses the very same word which the soldier would use concerning the victory, when, with garments rolled in blood, amidst confused noise and clouds of smoke, he counts all things but little if he may but hear the shout of triumph. So, Paul, regarding Christ as more glorious and excellent than mountains of prey, considered such a

prize to be worth all the fighting, even though he should agonize and sweat with blood. He would be well worth dying to win. I take it that he speaks of Christ here as though he felt that he was the very climax of his desire, the summit of his ambition. If he might but get Christ, he would be perfectly satisfied; but if he could not get him, whatever else he might have, he would still remain unblessed.

I would to God that you all felt the same. I wish that the ambition of every one of my fellow-creatures here assembled — and, indeed, the wide world over, — were this, that they might win Christ. Oh, if they did but know his preciousness, if they did but understand how happy and how blessed he makes those to be who gain him, they, too, would give up everything else for this one desire, — that they may win Christ. I hope that, perhaps, a few words of mine may be blessed of God the Spirit to stir up such a desire in the hearts of the congregation now assembled below then shall I begin?

Philippians 3:9 and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.

He does not say, not trusting it, but not even having it, not counting it, not thinking it worth while to put down among his possessions that which he once prized so much.

It must be more glorious to be justified by God than by ourselves. It must be more safe to wear the righteousness of Christ than to wear our own. Nothing can so dignify our manhood as to have Christ himself to be “the Lord our Righteousness.” This Paul chose in preference to everything else.

Philippians 3:10. That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made comfortable unto his death

Paul means, “That I may know him more than I now do;” for be knew him, and delighted in him; but he felt as if he bad not begun really to know Christ. He was like a child at school, who has learnt to read and to write, and knows so much that he begins to want to know more.

See to what Paul is looking forward, — resurrection, — and therefore he lets this life go as of secondary importance. He is willing to suffer as Christ suffered, and to die as Christ died. You and I may never be called to make that great sacrifice; but if we are true followers of Christ, we shall be prepared for it. If ever it should happen that Christ and our life shall be put in competition, we must not deliberate for a moment, for Christ is all, and we must be ready to give up all for Christ.

Philippians 3:11 if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.

He knew that all the dead would rise again; but he aspired to the first resurrection: “The rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished.”

You perhaps suppose that Paul’s present satisfaction arises out of a consciousness of personal perfection, but it is not so. He has not won the race yet, his joy arises from the feet that he is in the right course and that he is running in the right direction: “Not as though I had already attained, either were already I perfect:

Philippians 3:12. Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect. But I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.

“I want to lay hold of that for which Christ has laid hold of me. He has grasped me in order to make me perfect, and I want to grasp that perfection. He has laid hold of me to rid me of my sin, and I want to lay hold of a glean riddance of sin, apprehending that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.”

He did count himself as saved, he knew that he was Christ’s; but he did not count himself as having realized all that Christ meant to do for him and by him. He did not reckon that he bad reached as far as he could reach, or learnt all that he could learn, or done all that he could do.

He does not say that anybody has been perfect, but he does say that he was not so himself; and I should think that any man who believed himself to be better than Paul would thereby prove at once that he was not perfect, for he must be sadly lacking in humility.

“All that Christ meant me to be, I want to be. All that Christ meant to give me, I want to have. All that he meant me to do, I want to do; to apprehend, to lay hold of that for which I am laid hold of by Christ Jesus.”

Philippians 3:13 Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before,

That is Paul's judgment concerning himself; he has not yet attained to the full all that the religion of Christ can give him.

Philippians 3:14 I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

Always making progress, — throwing himself into it, having the reward before him, the prize of perfection in Christ, and running towards it with all his might.

The condition in which a believer should always be found is that of progress: his motto must be, "Onward and upward! "Nearly every figure by which Christians are described in the Bible implies this. We are plants of the Lord's field, but we are sown that we may grow — "First the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear." We are born into the family of God; but there are babes, little children, young men, and fathers in Christ Jesus; yea, and there are a few who are perfect or fully developed men in Christ Jesus. It is a growth evermore. Is the Christian described as a pilgrim? He is no pilgrim who sits down as if rooted to the place. "They go from strength to strength." The Christian is compared to a warrior, a wrestler, a competitor in the games: these figures are the very opposite of a condition in which nothing more is to be done. They imply energy, the gathering up of strength, and the concentration of forces, in order to the overthrowing of adversaries. The Christian is also likened to a runner in a race, and that is the figure now before us in the text. It is clear that a man cannot be a runner who merely holds his ground, contented with his position: he only runs aright who each moment nears the mark. Progress is the healthy condition of every Christian man; and he only realizes his best estate while he is growing in grace, "adding to his faith virtue," "following on to know the Lord," and daily receiving grace for grace out of the fullness which is treasured up in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 3:15 Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you.

I admire that sentence. If any brother has not reached a full knowledge of the truth, let us not condemn him, or cast him out of our company, but say to him, "God shall reveal even this unto you."

If you are a true believer in Jesus, be of this mind, always to be pressing forward to something higher and better. If God has given you one form of perfection, press onward to a much higher form of perfection. Seek continually to rise. The eagle's motto is, "Higher, Higher!" Let it be your motto too. Many of God's people do not believe that he can make them what he means to make them, or, at least, they act as if they did not believe that he can. They are not, apparently, conscious of what their privileges really are, and are living far below where they might live in the happy enjoyment of peace and power and usefulness. May God help us, by his gracious Spirit, to know all of Christ that we can know, and to be as much like Christ as we can be.

You have seen a man running very fast. How he leans forward, as though he would send his heart before him, and go quicker than his legs can carry him! So did the apostle "press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

Philippians 3:16. Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing.

Let us keep all the good that we have received; let us not give up the truth that we have learnt; let us not leave the way along which we have traveled so far; and let us keep together, let perfect unanimity prove that the work of grace is going on in one as well as in another.

There are some points upon which we are all agreed. There is some standing-ground where the babe in grace may meet with the man in Christ Jesus. Well, as far as we do see eye to eye, let us co-operate with one another, let us have our hearts knit together in a holy unanimity. "Let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing." There are some people who are always looking out for points of difference; their motto seems to be, "Whereinsoever we differ, let us split away from one another." Their great idea is that by dividing we shall conquer. The fact is that, by separating ourselves from one another, we shall miss all hope of strength, and play into the hands of the adversaries.

Philippians 3:17. Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample.

For the true servant of Christ teaches by his life as much as by his words.

In these days, certain people find fault with Paul, and speak of him as if he were not inspired, and not to be followed as Christ was; but here he expressly says what no man like Paul would ever say unless moved of the Holy Spirit, for he was modest, and by no means anxious to push himself forward: "Brethren, be followers together of me."

Mark them, but do not follow them. See how they walk, but do not imitate them: “Have us for an ensample.”

Philippians 3:18. Of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ.

The worst enemies that the cross of Christ has are the enemies inside the professing church of Christ.

I lay a stress upon the article: “They are the enemies of the cross of Christ.” Professors of religion, who get into the church, and yet lead ungodly lives, are the worst enemies that the cross of Christ has. These are the sort of men who bring tears into the minister’s eyes; these are they who break his heart; they are the enemies of the cross of Christ.

Philippians 3:19. Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.)

They call themselves spiritual, yet they live for earthly things; indulging their appetites, living for self, yet pretending to be Christians, whereas selfishness is the very reverse of Christianity.

“Who mind earthly things,” — even when they profess to be minding spiritual things; pretending to be followers of Christ up to heaven, and yet really making again of the things of God here below.

Philippians 3:20. For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ:

Can you say that, dear friend? Is your citizenship in heaven? Is your conversation there? Do you often commune with your Lord upon the throne? Judge yourselves whether it be so or not. It is a very poor thing to have a name to be in heaven, and yet never to have any converse with heaven. I wish that we could all say that we talk more to God than we do to men, and have more business upward than we have here below.

He is coming! He is coming! Are we looking for him? This is the true position of the Christian, looking for the appearing of his Lord.

Philippians 3:21. Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.

As his first advent has been our salvation from sin, so his second advent shall be our salvation from the grave.

Vile so far that it has been defiled by sin, vile in comparison with that body which shall be, — “Who shall change our vile body,” the body of our humiliation, —

“The body of our humiliation.” We have only part of the redemption while we are here. The soul is regenerated, newly-born; but the body is not. “The body is dead because of sin; but the spirit is life because of righteousness.” The redemption of the purchased possession will be perfect at the resurrection. The resurrection will be, to the body, what regeneration is to the soul. We sometimes wonder why we are sick, when Christ could make us well in a moment; but the reason is that, as yet, he has not fully brought his divine power to bear upon the body. That is to be by-and-by; we are waiting for the Savior, “who shall change our vile body.”

May he show some part of that blessed power in us to-night! Amen.

PHILIPPIANS 4

Philippians 4:1. Therefore, my brethren dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the lord, my dearly beloved.

Paul had a very warm affection for the church at Philippi. You remember how that church was established,-first with the baptized household of Lydia, and afterwards with the baptized household of the jailor. These saints at Philippi were in a special sense Paul’s spiritual children, they were very generous and kind to him and his heart was very warm with love to them, so he called them, “my brethren dearly beloved,” and then again, “my dearly beloved.”

It is a great joy to a minister, as it was to the apostle Paul, to have converts; but that joy is greatly diminished when they do not stand fast: then, indeed, every supposed joy becomes a sorrow, and instead of the roses which yield a sweet perfume to the Lord’s servant, thorns begin to prick and wound his heart.

See how the heart of the apostle is at work; his emotions are not dried up by his personal griefs. He takes a delight in his friends at Philippi; he has a lively recollection of the time when he and Silas were shut up in prison there, and that same night baptized the jailor and his household, and formed the church at Philippi.

Philippians 4:2. I beseech Euodias, and beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the Lord.

These two women had fallen out with one another, they evidently differed upon some question or other so that they were not "of the same mind in the Lord," and Paul thought it so important that there should be perfect unity and love in the church at Philippi, as well as everywhere else, that he besought these two women, of whom we know nothing else, that they would be "of the same mind in the Lord." Notice that he beseeches each of them in exactly the same way: "I beseech Euodias, and beseech Syntyche." He has a "beseech" for each of them. Perhaps, if he had written, "I beseech Euodias and Syntyche," the latter lady might have fancied that he was not quite so earnest about her as he was about Euodias so he puts it, "I beseech Euodias, and beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the Lord." Have any of you fallen out, my dear friends? I do not know of any of you who have done so, but if you have, I say to all you, men or women, "I beseech you, that you be of the same mind in the Lord." There is nothing like perfect unity in a Christian church; if there is even a little division, it will grow to something much worse by-and-by; so I beseech you "be of the same mind in the Lord.

Only two women, and we do not know who they were; yet Paul gives them a "beseech" each: "I beseech Euodias, and beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the Lord." If there are only two of the most obscure sisters in the church who are quarrelling, their differences ought to be brought to an end at once. There should be no disagreements amongst Christians, love should reign, peace should predominate. If there is anything contrary to such a state as that, God grant that it may soon be brought to an end!

These two good women had fallen out with one another. Paul loves them so much that he would not have any strife in the church to mar its harmony; and he therefore beseeches both of these good women to end their quarrel, and to "be of the same mind in the Lord." You cannot tell what hurt may come to a church through two members being at enmity against each other. They may be unknown persons, they may be Christian women, but they can work no end of mischief; and therefore it is a most desirable thing that they should speedily come together again in peace and unity.

Philippians 4:3 And I entreat thee also, true yokefellow, help those women which laboured with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and with other my fellowlabourers, whose names are in the book of life.

They helped me, and they have helped you, so help them with encouraging words and in every other way that you can.

He tenderly thinks of all those who had helped the work of the Lord, and, in return, he would have all of them helped, and kindly remembered, and affectionately cherished. May we always have this tender feeling towards one another, especially towards those who work for the Lord with us! May we ever delight in cheering those who serve our Lord!

Brother, do all the good you can to help everybody else to do good. Help those whose names are in the book of life, even if they are not known anywhere else. Also help the "Clement" whose name is known; be sure to help him; indeed, help everybody. There is an office, in the Church of Christ, which we do not sufficiently recognize; but which ought to be abundantly filled. Paul mentions it in writing to the Corinthians. He says, "And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues." It is the office of certain Christians to be "helps." May we always have many such "helps" amongst us! Did you ever notice that, almost every time that Bartholomew is mentioned in Scripture, we read, "and Bartholomew"? He is never spoken of alone; but it is written, "Philip, and Bartholomew," or "Bartholomew, and Matthew." It is good to have some Bartholomews who are always helping somebody else, so that, when there is any good work to be done, Bartholomew is always ready to share in it; for he shall also have a part in the reward at the last.

Philippians 4:4. Rejoice in the Lord alway:

Not only now and then, on high days and holiday, have a time of joy, but "rejoice in the Lord alway."

And again I say, Rejoice.

He had said this before, as you will see in the first verse of the third chapter, which begins, "Finally, my

brethren, rejoice in the Lord;" now he writes it again, and repeats it in the same verse: "Rejoice. Rejoice." It is so important that believers should be full of joy that Paul writes three times over in a short space, "Rejoice in the Lord;" "Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice."

The very word "rejoice," seems to imply a reduplication; it is joy, and re-joy, joy over again; but here, you see, it is a fourfold rejoicing; joy, and re-joy; and again I say, joy, and re-joy; and this is to be the Christian's continual experience, for the apostle says, "Rejoice in the Lord always."

Philippians 4:5. Let your moderation be known unto all men.

Be men who are God-governed, because God governs those who run to excess in nothing. Some go to excess in one way, and some in another; but all excess is to be avoided: "Let your moderation be known unto all men."

We have come to understand this word "moderation" in a sense not at all intended here. The best translation would probably be "forbearance." Do not get angry with anybody; do not begin to get fiery and impetuous: be forbearing, for the Lord is at hand. You cannot tell how soon he may appear; there is no time to spare for the indulgence of anger; be quiet; be patient; and if there be anything very wrong, well, leave it. Our Lord Jesus will come very soon; therefore be not impatient.

Philippians 4:6. Be careful for nothing; But in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests to made known unto God.

This is not a good translation of the original, it does not convey the sense of the Greek, it should to, "Be anxious for nothing." Of course you ought to be careful about everything. You cannot be too careful, but you never ought to be care-full, you must care to be right with God, yet you must not be filled with care about anything. "Be anxious for nothing." Do not fret, do not worry, do not make other people miserable by your fretting and fuming and fueling.

Ah! this is the way to find the cure for all your anxieties; take all your trouble to God with a prayer and with a song. Do not go without either the thanksgiving or the prayer; but bear your burden at once to God, and ask him to bear it for you.

Have no care, but much prayer. Prayer is the cure for care. If you are in trouble, "Let your requests be made known," not to your neighbors, but "unto God."

See how the apostle would bid us throw anxiety to the winds; let us try to do so. You cannot turn one hair white or black, fret as you may. You cannot add a cubit to your stature, be you as anxious as you please. It will be for your own advantage, and it will be for God's glory, for you to shake off the anxieties which else might overshadow your spirit. Be anxious about nothing, but prayerful about everything, and be thankful about everything as well. Is not that a beautiful trait in Paul's character? He is a prisoner at Rome, and likely soon to die; yet he mingles thanksgiving with his supplication, and asks others to do the same. We have always something for which to thank God, therefore let us also obey the apostolic injunction.

Pray about everything; I make no exception to this. Pray about waking in the morning, and pray about falling asleep at night. Pray about any great event in your life, but pray equally about what you call the minor events. Pray as Jacob did when he crossed the brook Jabbok; but do not forget to pray when there is no angry Esau near, and no special danger to fear. The simplest thing, that is not prayed over, may have more evil in it than what appears to be the direst evil when once it has been brought to God in prayer. I pray that all of you, who love the Lord, may commit yourselves afresh to Christ this very hour. I wish to do so myself, saying, "My Master, here am I; take me, and do as thou wilt with me. Use me for thy glory in any way that thou pleasest. Deprive me of every comfort, if so I shall the more be able to honor thee. Let my choicest treasures be surrendered if thy sovereign will shall so ordain." Let every child of God make a complete surrender here and now, and ask for grace to stand to it. Your greatest sorrow will come when you begin to be untrue to your full surrender to the Lord; so may you never prove untrue to it!

Philippians 4:7. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:8. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Be on the side of everything that is good and right, everything that helps on true human progress, everything

that increases virtue and purity. As a Christian man, take an interest in everything that helps to make men true, honest, just, pure, and lovely.

If anything is true, honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report, be you on that side. A Christian is on the side of everything that makes for purity, chastity, and honesty, that is for the good of men and the glory of God. Whenever anyone is making out a list of those who will fight for everything that is right and good, every Christian should say to the man with the ink-horn, “Set down my name, sir.”

If there is any really good movement in the world, help it, you Christian people. If it is not purely and absolutely religious, yet if it tends to the benefit of your fellow-men, if it promotes honesty, justice, purity, take care that you are on that side, and do all you can to help it forward.

Philippians 4:9 Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall to with you,

May the Lord fulfill that gracious word to all of us, “The God of peace shall be with you”! Amen.

Paul was a grand preacher to be able to say that; to hold up his own example, as well as his own teaching, as a thing which the people might safely follow.

Philippians 4:10. But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again; wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity.

“I rejoiced.” So Paul was himself in a happy mood; these saints in Philippi had sent to him in prison a gift by the hand of one of their pastors, and Paul, in his deep poverty, had been much comforted by their kind thoughtfulness about him.

You see that Paul did not really mean, “Be careful for nothing,” for he says here that there Philippians had cared for him, and he praises them for being careful of him. They had lovingly thought of him who was their spiritual father, and when they knew that he was shut up as a prisoner in Rome, and suffering want, they took care to send something to relieve and cheer him.

In the seventh verse, we had the expression, “the peace of God.” In this ninth verse, we have the mention of “the God of peace.” May we first enjoy the peace of God, and then be helped by the Spirit of God to get into a still higher region, where we shall be more fully acquainted with the God of peace!

Philippians 4:11. Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.

“I have been initiated”-for that is the word,-”among those who are content with such things as they have.”

That was not an easy lesson to learn, especially when one of those states meant being in prison at Rome. If he was ever in the Mamertine, those of us who have been in that dungeon would confess that it would take a deal of grace to make us content to be there; and if he was shut up in the prison of the Palatine hill, in the barracks near the morass, it was, to say the least, not a desirable place to be in. A soldier chained to your hand clay and night, however good a fellow he may be, does not always make the most delightful company for you, nor you for him; and it takes some time to learn to be content with such a companion; but, says Paul, “I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.”

Philippians 4:12 I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.

“I can be poor, or I can have abundance, if you send it to me, but these things make no real difference to me. I have been made invulnerable either to suffering or to abundance.” Blessed is the man who has got as far as that; it is a wonderful work of grace when a man can truly say this.

These are both hard lessons to learn; I do not know which is the more difficult of the two. Probably it is easier to know how to go down than to know how to go up. How many Christians have I seen grandly glorifying God in sickness and poverty when they have come down in the world; and ah! how often have I seen other Christians dishonoring God when they have grown rich, or when they have risen to a position of influence among their fellow-men! These two lessons grace alone can fully teach us.

Philippians 4:13. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.

What a gracious attainment! There is no boasting in this declaration; Paul only spoke what was literally the truth.

Philippians 4:14 Notwithstanding ye have well done, that ye did communicate with my affliction.

Philippians 4:15. Now ye Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only.

> I should not wonder if it was Lydia who was at the bottom of that giving and receiving, and perhaps the jailor also; they were evidently thoughtful and grateful people. They remembered the apostle's sufferings and wants and did all they could to help and cheer him.

Philippians 4:16. For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity.

The Philippians were the only Christians who had sent any help to this great sufferer for Christ's sake in the time of his need.

Philippians 4:17.Not because I desire a gift: but I desire fruit that may abound to your account.

> He did not look at it as merely something that would ease him, but he looked at it as a token of gratitude for the spiritual blessings they had received through him. It showed that they loved the gospel which he preached, and that they also loved him for having been blessed by God to their souls; and this cheered and delighted him. But, to show that he was not asking for more, he says:

Philippians 4:18. But I have all, and abound: I am full,-

> I do not suppose that it amounted to much, but it was all that the apostle needed, and so he says to them, "I have all, and abound: I am full,"-
>
> I am sure that, when they read this verse, they all felt glad that they had had a share in the subscription to relieve the apostle's wants.
>
> I do not suppose that they sent him very much; but he knew the love that prompted the gift, he understood what they meant by it. I always had a fancy that Lydia was the first to suggest that kind deed. She, the first convert of the Philippian church, thought of Paul, I doubt not, and said to the other believers, "Let us take care of him as far as we can. See how he spends his whole life in the Master's service, and now he may at last die in prison for want of even common necessaries; let us send him a present to Rome." How grateful is the apostle for that gift of love! What gladness they had put into his heart! Now he says: —

Philippians 4:19. Having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well pleasing to God. But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

> "You have supplied my need out of your poverty; my God shall supply all your need out of his riches. Your greatest need shall not exceed the liberality of his supplies."

Philippians 4:20 Now unto God and our Father to glory for ever and ever. Amen. Salute every saint in Christ Jesus.

> "Give them all my love; and tell them how grateful I am to them."
>
> The religion of Christ is full of courtesy, and it is full of generous thoughtfulness. I do not think that he can be a Christian who has no knowledge nor care about his fellow church-members.

Philippians 4:21 The brethren which are with me greet you.

> They saw that he was writing a letter, and they therefore said, "Send our love to the Philippians."

Philippians 4:22 The brethren which are with me greet you. All the saint salute you, chiefly they that are of Caesar's household.

> Exposed to the greatest perils, and yet brave to confess Christ. They may have been nothing but poor kitchen-maids, or they may have been among the Praetorian guards who watched and guarded the palace and the prisoners, but they must have their title set down in the letter, "chiefly they that are of Caesar's household."
>
> Only think of saints in the household of Nero, saints in the service of such a demon as he was, and saints who were first in every good thing: "Chiefly they that are of Caesar's household."

Philippians 4:23. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

INSIGNIFICANCE INTO INFLUENCE
Philippians 1:12
Robert Morgan

> Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the Gospel.
> Philippians 1:12

One freezing February day in the 1800s, crowds of people gathered on a snow-covered field twelve miles west of Dublin, Ireland. Two men had been feuding, and their dispute had become the talk of the town. Now they had determined to settle the manner by staging a duel. By nightfall, one of the men was dead. His name was John D'Esterre; and the winner of the duel was a famous Irish politician named Daniel O'Connell.

John D'Esterre left behind a young wife named Jane. Only eighteen years old, she already had two small children to support. There was little money in the bank, and immediately after the death of her husband, the bailiffs arrived at her home to seize and appropriate all her husband's goods. When they left, they told her they were also going to confiscate her husband's corpse and sell it to the hospital mortuary to pay some of the remaining debts.

With the help of some friends, Jane snuck her husband's body out of the city that night and hastily buried him in an unmarked grave by lantern light.

Knowing her creditors would never leave her in peace, she decided to flee into Scotland, and there she settled down in the little village of Ecclefachan where she sunk into a deep depression. One day she took a novel down to the river to read for awhile, but her heart wasn't in reading. She was too distracted and distraught. Sitting there, her self-pity deepened to dangerous levels, and she contemplated suicide.

Suddenly Jane heard a noise coming from the other side of the river. It was a young ploughman who had entered his field and was commencing his work. As he welded the plow behind the animals, he began whistling Christian hymns. The youth was well-known in the area, in fact, for being a "hymn-whistler." Jane watched him, and something about his spirit and attitude touched her.

She had two small children dependant on her. She was healthy and had her whole life in front of her. If a simply ploughman could display such cheer and enthusiasm for the mundane work of his life, why should not she?

Armed with a new perspective, she returned to Dublin where, shortly afterward, she attended a service at St. George's Church and heard a sermon from John 3:16. Soon she trusted Jesus Christ as her Savior. Jane grew in faith, and God gave her an unusual burden. She began to pray earnestly for her children and for the next twelve generations who would follower her.

One day the Lord brought a new man into Jane's life, a very wealthy man named Captain John Guinness, and the two were married. Jane continued raising her children and praying for her twelve subsequent generations. She asked God to provide a continuing Christian witness in the world through her descendants.

The result? Her son, Grattan, gave away his fortune and became a minister. He preached to thousands and helped trigger the huge 1859 revival in Ireland in which as many as 100,000 people came to Christ in one year. The largest buildings in Ireland could not hold the crowds coming to hear him preach.

From his descendants alone (not to mention the other extending branches of the family tree) have come a host of Christian workers who have traveled the world with the Good News of Jesus Christ. Even today, the name of Dr. Os Guinness is known around the world. Born to missionary parents in China, he was been a statesman for Christ in his generation.

As I read the remarkable story of Jane Guinness, three thoughts came to mind. First, the power of influence. Here we have a woman and twelve ensuing generations, all of them changed simply because of a ploughboy who was whistling Christian hymns as he worked. The lad never knew the intense power of the simple unconscious influence he was exerting. It reminds us that people are watching us whether we know it or not, and even our simplest acts of Christian witness and kindness can change this world when God is involved.

The second thing that impressed me was the power of a parent's prayers. We underestimate the power of earnest, consistent

praying for our children and grandchildren. There's no force on earth like the prayers of a parent, or grandparent, or great-grandparent.

The third thing that impressed me was the way God took a series of tragedies and turned them into tools for the expanding of His kingdom. He took gloomy, hopeless circumstances and used them as a means of bringing the Good News of Christ to hundreds of thousands of people for over twelve generations in history.[1]

That's the theme of today's message. In our series of sermons so far, we've learned that:

- Romans 8:28 tells us that all things work together for our good.
- Genesis 5:20 tells us that all things work together for the good of others.
- Ephesians 1:11-12 tell us that all things work together in conformity with the purpose of God's will.
- Now Philippians 1:12 tells us that all things work together for the advancing of the Gospel.

Let's read exactly what Paul told the Philippians:

Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the Gospel. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly (Philippians 1:12-14, NIV).

Notice that first phrase: The things that have happened to me.

Alexander Maclaren said, "That is Paul's minimizing euphemism for the grim realities of imprisonment."[2]

What had happened to Paul? He had been planning a fourth missionary trip that would take him into Western Europe. In just ten remarkable years, he had effectively evangelized the major cities of Eastern Europe and Western Asia. He and his associates had planted churches in Philippi, Ephesus, Corinth, and in many other cities. The entire province of Asia Minor had been targeted in a major missionary campaign. He had attempted to plant a church in Athens, the ancient capital of the Hellenistic world. Now he had wanted to press the frontiers of the Gospel westward, past Italy, past Rome, and on toward Spain, Gaul, and Britain. But just at the moment when his dreams were about to burst into reality, he was seized in Jerusalem, incarcerated in Caesarea, and placed under house arrest in Rome. Now he was literally sitting in chain while his dreams of evangelizing Western Europe were slowly fading away. Time was passing him by. His health wasn't good, and there was no quick ending in sight to his legal problems. Furthermore, it was a terrifying thing to be a political prisoner in the iron-like vice of the ancient empire of Rome, to be at the mercy of an Emperor and at the mercy of the most brutal soldiers the world had thus far produced.

Yet Paul's simple phrase summarizing all of this is simply: "The things that have happened to me."

I think he used that simple phrase for two reasons. First, he didn't feel like going into great detail. He wasn't one to share every facet of his problems with someone else. He belonged to the old school that said, "It isn't necessarily wise for me to waste my time by giving endless inventories of all my problems to others."

Our tendency today is to ventilate every detail of every burden. Of course, we do sometimes need to unload our hearts to an old and trusted friend. But Paul was very discreet and reserved in detailing his situation. He wasn't overly anxious, and he didn't want others to be either. He was trusting God and rejoicing.

I think there was another reason why he used the simple phrase, the things that have happened to me. It was for the same reason that he referred to his serious illness or disease as the thorn in the flesh in 2 Corinthians 12. Paul never told us what his thorn in the flesh was. He didn't describe it in excruciating detail, and Christian scholars have been curious for nearly two thousand years as to the nature of Paul's malady. Why didn't he tell us? In this passage, why doesn't he describe the specific nature of the things that had happened to him? I believe Paul sometimes dealt in personal generalities that we might more easily apply his lessons to our lives.

Few of us will ever have the exact disease that afflicted Paul, but all of us will face sickness and disease. Few of us will ever be thrown into a Roman prison, but all of us will have negative things happening to us. This is a universal phrase—the things that have happened to me. It is a euphemism for the disasters and tragedies and difficulties and troubles of life. What are the things that have happened to you? You didn't cause them, at least not knowingly or deliberately. You didn't want them. You didn't ask for

them. They just happened. They came uninvited and unwelcomed like a bunch of thugs that showed up at the party, elbowed their way in, and were loathe to leave. Like an infestation of termites that suddenly takes over your house. Like a handful of cancer cells that suddenly invade your body. All of us can identify with this deceptively simple phrase: the things that have happened to me.

But suddenly our whole perception changes when we read the rest of the sentence: Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the Gospel.

This word that is translated here advance was a Greek word—prokope—that was used in Bible times for pioneers cutting their way through forests, pressing onward and opening new frontiers. It was used of an army advancing over land and across mountains, pressing forward to conquer new territory. And the word Gospel is a word that means the Good News that God became a man named Jesus Christ who died and rose again to reconcile the human race to Himself and to give you and me everlasting life through the forgiveness gained by the shedding of His blood.

Paul was saying: My shattered dreams, my demolished plans, my hopes for taking the Gospel to Western Europe, my incarceration, my Roman prison, my chains and confinement… all of this has fallen out rather for the furtherance of the Gospel.

The devil tried to hinder the Gospel, but God turned the tables on him. The very things he had planned to hinder the Gospel actually helped it on its way.

So here is the principle: God not only works all things out for our good and for the good of others, He not only works all things out according to the council of His will, He also works all things out for the furtherance of the Gospel. He takes the circumstances of life and makes the platforms and arenas in which the Gospel can be shared. He takes our bad news and turns it into opportunities for sharing the Good News.

In this text in Philippians 1, Paul demonstrates for us three ways in which the Gospel has been advanced

It Puts Souls in Our Pathway

First, problems put souls in our pathways. Paul was claiming that as a result of his problems he had found a whole new audience for his message. His circumstances actually helped him in his great purpose of evangelizing the lost. Look at verses 12-13: Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the Gospel. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ.

Because of his imprisonment, Paul had gained access into two groups that were very difficult to reach with the Gospel. In fact, these two groups were, humanly speaking, off limits to any kind of evangelistic effort.

The first group was the Palace Guard, or the Praetorian Guard. These were the Imperial Troops, an army within the army, consisting of 9,000 elite soldiers who personally served the Roman Emperor. It had been instituted by Caesar Augustus. Because he was a high profile political prisoner, Paul was entrusted into the keeping of the Praetorian Guard, and he was apparently chained, wrist-to-wrist, with an endlessly rotating number of these soldiers, probably several a day, in shifts. Can you imagine being chained wrist-to-wrist with the apostle Paul for hours at a time? As these men got to know him, as he shared his testimony, as he wrote his letters, as he counseled those who came to him, as he prayed with his friends, as he preached to small groups, one soldier after another came to faith in Christ and the Gospel was spreading among the top echelons of the Roman Army.

Then there was another group being saved. Paul simply calls them “everyone else” here in verse 13: As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains.

Everyone else was a term that certainly included (but was not limited to) members of the royal household. We know that because of something Paul wrote at the end of this book of Philippians: Al the saints send you greetings, especially those of Caesar’s household.

So the great lesson of Philippians 1:12-13 is that God has His purposes for our lives when our dreams are shattered, when our plans are changed, and when trouble and limitations come into our lives. He intends His children to consider these times as special opportunities to evangelize.

Isobel Kuhn was a missionary to China who became well known as a writer of Christian classics. Her last book, written as she was dying of cancer, is entitled In the Arena. I’ve thumbed through my paperback copy so many times the pages are coming out now and I have to secure it with a rubber band. In it she looked back over her life and described various obstacles, difficulties, and

heartbreaks she had encountered; and she said that by the grace of God she had come to realize that all of them had become platforms and arenas in which God could be glorified and His Word spread to those who needed it.

This little book has twelve chapters, and I am going to list them for you:

1. Obstacles
2. Uncongenial Work
3. Secret Choices
4. Crossed Nature
5. Frustrations
6. Extinguished Candle-flames
7. Small Harassments
8. Taut Nerves
9. Seeming Defeat
10. Between the Scissors' Knives
11. Stranded at the World's End
12. Dread Disease

All those things in our lives become platforms for the Gospel.

A couple of weeks ago, as I drove to Louisville to see my grandchildren, just as I crossed the state line into Kentucky, I felt a pop and a puff, and suddenly my car lurched to one side and developed a frightening texture to its forward progress. I was barely able to reach the right shoulder of the road, and it wasn't much of a shoulder. I couldn't possibly open my driver's-side door because of the trucks and cars racing blindly over a little hill and across a bridge on the interstate. To remain in the car was dangerous, and with great effort I crawled across the seat and got out of my car, squeezing between the driver's-side door and the guard-rail. I called the automobile club and waited for help to arrive. After a while, a patrol car pulled up. It was the local sheriff's deputy. He told me that he wanted to say with me until help arrived because it was such a dangerous spot, that I'd be safer in the car with him with his flashing lights. So I spent about forty-five minutes in his car waiting for the tow truck to arrive. It gave me a chance to talk with him about his family, about his little boy, about his soul. Later I sent him a set of the two children's books I'd written for him to use with his son. What seemed to be a major inconvenience turned out to be an opportunity for witnessing.

Something similar happened to me several years ago in Gatlinburg. I walked out of our hotel room to find that someone had shattered the window of my car during the night, apparently with a baseball bat or some such device. The hotel refused to assume any liability, and I was very upset; but there was nothing I could do except to find a glass replacement dealer. By and by a young man named Jim came out with his truck to repair the damage. I was just fuming; but I was very grateful for this young man. I watched with admiration as Jim systematically disassembled the van's door, removed the splinters of glass, and slipped a new window into place. His young assistant resembled him, and I asked if they were related.

"He's my little brother," said Jim. "He's filling in till I can find someone to replace my co-worker who died last week. He had a wife and two kids. Just forty-two. Died of a heart attack." That gave me an opening to gently and carefully share a word of Gospel witness with Jim, to talk with him about the brevity and the uncertainty of life, and to share with him our need for a Savior. I realized that an apparent random act of destruction was actually a divine appointment for the sharing of the Gospel.

Over and over, it we train ourselves to see it, our worst problems become our best pulpits.

The great Dutch Christian and holocaust survivor, Corrie ten Boom, once wrote an article entitled "My Unforgettable Christmas." It was Christmas of 1944, and she was in the hospital barracks of Ravensbruck, the Nazi prison camp. There were Christmas trees here and there in the streets between the barracks, but underneath them were the bodies of dead prisoners who had been thrown out. Corrie had tried to talk to some of her fellow sufferers about Christmas, but they were in no mood for it, and finally she had decided to just keep quiet.

In the middle of the night, she heard a child calling out, "Mommy! Come to Oelie. Oelie feels so alone." Corrie went and found the child, who turned out not to be so young after all, but who was feeble-minded. Oelie was emaciated, and a bandage of toilet paper covered an incision from surgery on her back. Through that long, dark night, Corrie stayed with Oelie and told her about Jesus, how he came to earth as a baby at Christmas, how He loved us, how He died for our sins, how He had risen from the death, and how He was now in heaven preparing a beautiful house for us. Oelie learned to trust Christ as her Savior and how to pray to Him and how to gain strength from Him. And in writing out the story years later, Corrie ten Boom added these words: "Then I knew why I had to spend this Christmas in Ravensbruck."[3]

Somehow in the wonder-working providence of God, our worst problems become our best pulpits. I've never forgotten about something that happened to my friend who is now in heaven, Evelyn Hersey, missionary to Japan. For years she had sought to win a certain man to Christ. She eventually developed cancer and returned to America for medical treatments. As she was dying, she called her Japanese friend and said, "Don't worry about me, for I'm bound for heaven. I just want you to know that we love you and I'll be praying for you." The man shortly afterward became a Christian. He said, "How could I fail to trust a Savior who gave my friend the kindness and love to pray for me even when she was sick and dying?"

Another friend and former TDF member, Celecia Cutts, once told me of a time when she was sitting in a church service and the minister asked, "Will those of you who are willing to do anything necessary to lead others to Christ please raise your hands?" Celecia cautiously lifted her hand.

While returning from nursing school a few days later, Celecia saw another driver coming toward her, trying to pass an eighteen-wheeler. She swerved. Her car slammed into the truck and rolled over three times before careening down an embankment.

For days, Celecia hovered between coma and consciousness. Her mother sat by her bed, holding her hand and praying. In the same semi-private room, another mother sat by her diseased daughter, listening. By the time Celecia recovered, her mother had won both the other mother and her daughter to the Lord.

God turns tragedies into testimonies, and uses emergencies for evangelism.

If that's true, what do we need to do? There are three important ingredients that we've got to throw into the bowl.

First, memorize some verse or series of verses that will enable you to share Christ with someone. Learn a simple plan of salvation. It can be as extensive as our FAITH outline that we teach in our outreach classes, or as simple as Romans 6:23: For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ His Son. Even if it is only one bullet, keep the revolver of your testimony ready for firing.

Second, train yourself to look at life's situations as opportunities to witness. One of the first things to ask yourself in a moment of difficulty is: "Is there someone here that God wants me to reach?" We see this attitude in Paul's on heart when we underline ten words in a subsequent verse. Notice the words Paul used in the last half of verse 16: I am put here for the defense of the Gospel.

He said, "I am put," as though God had deliberately placed him where he was. It's no accident that we find ourselves in tough places. It's not a mistake on God's part when we're confronted with difficulties. Paul said, "God put me here." Why? For the defense of the Gospel. To explain and share and defend the Good News. So learn to look at life's situations through that set of eyeglasses; it makes a huge difference in our attitude.

And third, go ahead and open your mouth. If you get half a chance, say a word for the Lord. The Bible says, "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so."

And fourth, don't underestimate how God can eventually use even a simple witness—like the whistling of a ploughboy. Our labor in the Lord is not in vain. Or as Peter put it:

In your hearts set apart Christ as Lord, and always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that is within you.

Here's another example. In the summer of 1979, the Christian organization, Campus Crusade for Christ, sponsored a retreat for the wives of staff members. It was in Northern Colorado, near Estes Park. By mid-afternoon, it had begun to rain; and at 7:35 p.m., the National Weather Service issued a severe thunderstorm warning. Suddenly the bottom fell out of the sky, and over eleven inches of rain fell in just four hours. The narrow canyon where the women were meeting was filled with a deluge of water twenty feet high. One hundred thirty-nine people died in the Big Thompson flood, including seven of the Campus Crusade staff wives.

Several weeks later, as the Campus Crusade family mourned for those they had lost, someone hit on a unique and novel idea to honor them. It was decided to make their last moments on earth a tribute to the faithfulness of God. With the full approval of their families, Campus Crusade placed ads in the major newspapers across America. The advertisement said:

"These seven women lost their lives in the Colorado flood, but they are still alive and they have a message for you."

Those ads reached approximately 150 million people around the world, and thousands of people wrote back to say they had received Jesus Christ as Savior as a result of the tragic loss of those seven women. The American ambassador of an overseas country got in touch to say that his life had been changed by the words he read, and he later helped open that foreign nation to the work of Campus Crusade.

We see things like this over and over in the two thousand year sweep of Christianity. Nothing creates revival or spreads the Gospel like those negative events orchestrated by the devil, but co-opted and used by the Lord for the spreading of the Gospel. Suffering puts a new set of people in our pathway.

It Puts Strength in our People

Second, it puts courage in those who are watching us. As we study the book of Philippians, it becomes apparent that one of the major themes of the this letter is joy and rejoicing. Though he is imprisoned, Paul wrote a letter that radiates joy in every chapter. If you've never before tried this, read through the book with a pencil or pen, underlining every reference in Philippians to joy and rejoicing. Why can Paul, imprisoned as he was, exude such an atmosphere of joy and rejoicing? Part of the reason is that he was focused on the way the Lord was using the very circumstances that appeared to be miserable and hopeless.

In his little commentary on Philippians, Warren Wiersbe said, "The secret is this… look on your circumstances as God-given opportunities for the furtherance of the Gospel, and… rejoice about what God is going to do instead of complaining about whatGod did not do."

Well as we continue our study of this passage, the apostle is going on to say that there is another great evangelistic result coming from the things that had happened to him. It puts stamina in our people. It motivates them to share Christ themselves, and to do it more courageously and fearlessly.

Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the Gospel. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly.

Notice the words he uses. Not all, but most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God—and to do it with renewed boldness. The Amplified Bible puts it: "And [also] most of the brethren have derived fresh confidence in the Lord because of my chains, and are much more bold to speak and publish fearlessly the Word of God—acting with more freedom and indifference to the consequences."

I don't know if this is true for you, but very often I find that nothing motives me like seeing the example of someone else.

Many years ago in Scotland, the nefarious churchman, Cardinal David Beaton, began persecuting Lutheran and Protestant preachers and condemning evangelical Christians to the stake. One of those who died was Patrick Hamilton, who was burned to a crisp.

What he didn't realize is that he was making heroes and martyrs and saints out of ordinary, everyday Christians. He was providing these heroic men and women a powerful platform for their testimony. One man finally came up to Cardinal Beaton and told him that he was ruining his own cause, and he gave the cardinal this advice: "If you burn any more you should burn them in low cellars, for the smoke of Mr. Patrick Hamilton has infected as many as it blew upon."[4]

That reminds me of the famous saying about John Wycliffe. He was called the "Morning Star of the Reformation" because he started preaching the pure Gospel in the midst of corrupt days. He would have been burned at the stake himself had he not died first of natural causes. He was buried in the churchyard, but forty-one years later, he was still hated by his enemies who ordered that his bones be exhumed and burned and thrown into a nearby brook known as the Swift River.

As an ancient biographer wrote, "They burnt his bones to ashes and cast them into the Swift, a neighboring brook running hard by. Thus the brook conveyed his ashes into the Avon, the Avon into the Severn, the Severn into the narrow seas and they into the main ocean. And so the ashes of Wycliffe are symbolic of his doctrine, which is now spread throughout the world."

Whenever we stand for Christ at a difficult time, it not only evangelizes the lost, it motives the saved. The influence of our witness is like smoke that infects as many as it blows upon. It's like the ashes of Wycliffe that spreads to every land on earth.

Now, in our text, Paul went on to say that not everyone who started sharing Christ did so from the purest of motives. Verse 15ff says: It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. The latter do so in love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the Gospel. The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains.

Now, we really don't know who these people were who were preaching Christ out of selfish ambition. They were not Judaizers or false teachers, because they seem to have been preaching the pure Gospel; they were just doing it from impure motives. Even in the city of Rome with Paul himself there in chains he had his critics within the church. He was saying, in effect, "My imprisonment has created a real flurry of activity here in Rome, and Christians—even my critics—are having a greater opportunity to preach and to witness. Whether their motives are pure or not, at least Christ is being preached, and because of that I'm just sitting here rejoicing.

But what does it matter?

I think that's a great question, and I've learned to adopt this philosophy at different times. I like the way it's put here in the NIV. We have little disagreements, we get our feelings hurt, we notice someone doing something from an inferior motivation, we see something that makes us want to react. Maybe we should just say: But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice.

So trials and troubles in our lives bring people into our pathways. They allow us to provide a motivating example to others. And there is a third thing here, a third way in which the imprisonment of the apostle Paul served to advance the Gospel. It isn't in the text, it is the text.

It Puts Ink in our Pens

Paul's imprisonment put ink in his pen and created the occasion in which he penned his famous prison epistles, including Philippians, Ephesians, and Colossians. The devil thought he was shutting Paul up, and instead he created a situation in which Paul ministered to the ages. Who can ever calculate how many millions have come to Christ through sermons based in the Prison Epistles? If it had not been for this disruption, this disaster, we would never have had some of our greatest passages of Scripture.

We would not have had the passage in Philippians 2 that says:

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and because obedient to the point of death, even death on the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and has given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:5-11, NKJV)

We would not have the passage in Philippians 3 that says:

Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:12-14, NKJV).

We would not have the passage in Philippians 4 that says:

Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:4-5).

And we would not have equally precious verses in those other letters that Paul wrote from his prison cell.

It's like John Bunyan. It was exceedingly cruel what they did to him, tearing him away from his family and his little blind daughter, just because he wanted to preach as a Baptist minister. He nearly rotted in Bedford Jail for his faith in Christ. He was there for years. But out of his imprisonment came over sixty books, including the immortal classic Pilgrim's Progress, that has helped take Christianity to the ends of the earth and into many a heart.

In my research into the history of hymnology, I discovered—this did not really surprise me—that many of our greatest hymns were written by men and women who were encountering a period of suffering in life. A good example is Luther Bridges' great Gospel song, "He Keeps Me Singing." Bridges was an old-time evangelist whose wife and three children perished in a fire. When he received news of their deaths, he just about went out of his mind, but he found strength in the word of God and out of that experience he wrote:

There's within my heart a melody, Jesus whispers sweet and low:
"Fear not, I am with thee; peace be still, in all of life's ebb and flow.
Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, sweetest name I know,
Fills my every longing, keeps me singing as I go.

And I encourage every one of us to keep a journal, write letters, write poems, express your testimony in pen and ink, send out e-mails. Find every way you can to share your testimony of God's faithfulness and to tell others of how He keeps you singing.

Our testimonies are forged and crafted in the trials of life, our pain has an evangelistic purpose in God's hands, our problems become His pulpits, and the things that happen to us turn out rather for the furtherance of the Gospel.

---

1 This story is told by Derick Bingham in his little booklet, A Guinness with a Difference: The Story of the Whistling Ploughboy of Eccefechan. Copies can be obtained from TBF Thompson Ministries, 12 Killyvally Road Carvagh, Co Londonderry, N Ireland BT51 5JZ.
2 Alexander Maclaren, Expositions of the Holy Scriptures: Second Corinthians VII to End, Galatians, and Philippians(Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1982), p. 212.
3 "My Unforgettable Christmas" by Corrie ten Boom, in Moody Monthly Magazine, December, 1976, p. 27.
4 Alexander Maclaren, Expositions of the Holy Scriptures: Second Corinthians VII to End, Galatians, and Philippians(Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1982), p. 215. In the original quotation the word "reek" is used. Maclaren put the word "smoke" is parenthesis to update the term for his readers

God in Three Persons Blessed Trinity
Philippians 2:5-7
Robert Morgan

A couple of weeks ago during the Olympics, I was watching a recap of the previous day's events, and there was one scene painful to watch. It had to do with a Swedish wrestler named Ara Abrahamian, who had won the bronze medal in his event. He was so angry and frustrated over failing to win the gold medal that as he stood there on the winner's podium during the awards ceremony, he boiled over. He took off his third-place medal, threw it on the ground, and stormed off, saying, "I don't care about this medal. I wanted gold."

Well, none of us would condone that behavior, and yet all of us can understand it a little bit, because we live in a society which is competitive by nature. We all want to be Number 1, and we struggle with a sense of failure if we aren't on top of the heap. This has been the epic struggle that has characterized human history.

One of the most famous statutes in the city of Rome is the unusual image of two twin boys being suckled by a she-wolf. It's the legendary story of Romulus and Remus, two abandoned little boys who were found and fed by a she-wolf, then adopted by a shepherd. In the course of time, both boys grew up and together they founded a great city on seven hills. But each brother wanted the city named for himself and each of them wanted to be king. They fought, and Romulus killed his brother and named the city for himself—Rome. Historians say that legend illustrates the undergirding theme of the history of the Roman Empire, but really it's the undergirding theme of all of human history and of much of our own behavior.

We want to be first, and we often attach our dignity and self-worth to our rank, status, and achievements in life. Somehow we feel that our value in life is dependent on our status, and that our self-worth is based on our ranking. That philosophy—which drives almost everything in our society from politics to business and finance to entertainment to sports—is devilish. It's the philosophy that made Lucifer compete with God for the Throne of Heaven. It has ruined millions of lives and started thousands of wars. And in all the world there is only one corrective for this condition.

It is the doctrine of the Trinity.

The reality of the Tri-unity of God teaches us that there is no correlation in the least between status and self-worth. We can be second or third or fiftieth—or six billionth—and have just as much value and dignity as the person who is first. Humility does not negate dignity. The man who is scrubbing the floor in the White House is just as valuable and has just as much dignity as the President who walks across that floor. The laborer who sweats in the factory is just as valuable as the executive who lives in the penthouse. The player who strikes out in the minor leagues is just as valuable as the one making ten million in the major leagues. Our morale, self-worth, confidence, and satisfaction in life do not depend on rank or renown, or on fame and fortune.

That relationship-reality is a direct implication of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, and that's what I'd like for us to look at today. Our Scripture reading is Philippians 2:5-7:

> Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

There are three important phrases in this passage to consider today. This is going to be a very simple message to outline. First, we'll look at the opening phrase of verse 6. Then we'll look at the opening phrase of verse 7. Then, third, we'll go back and look at the opening phrase of verse 5. So if you want to underline these phrases, here they are:

> Verse 6: Who, being in very nature God….
> Verse 7: But made Himself nothing…
> Verse 5: Your attitude should be the same…

1. Who Being In Very Nature God

That's our outline. Let's begin with verse 6: Who being in very nature God. This belief is essential to the doctrine of the Trinity, and so I've spent three weeks now on this subject, but I think it's important because many Christians don't fully grasp this. I recall hearing Dr. D. James Kennedy of Florida talk about this in a sermon once. He said that he was visiting in a certain home and asked the man who he thought Jesus was. The gentleman replied, "Oh, He's a wonderful man. He was the greatest man who ever lived, the most loving and gracious person who ever walked upon this earth."

Kennedy replied, "Let me tell you something I believe will startle you. According to the Scriptures and the historic Christian faith, Jesus of Nazareth, the carpenter of Galilee was and is the eternal Creator of the universe, the omnipotent, omniscient, and Almighty God."

Kennedy said that the man's eyes filled with tears and he said, "I have been in church all my life and I never heard that before. But I have always thought that is the way it ought to be."

Why do Christians and why does historic Christianity in all its major branches insist on the doctrine of the deity of Jesus Christ—that Jesus of Nazareth was and is and always will be God Most High?

A. Because of His title Lord.

That was a divine title that was applied to Jehovah or Yahweh 6,814 times in the Greek Old Testament. The New Testament writers picked up this term and used it as the primary designation for Jesus Christ. When John the Baptist came to announce the arrival of the Messiah, he cried out, "Prepare the way of the Lord." The New Testament formula for salvation was acknowledging that Jesus Christ was Lord. As you read through the New Testament, you find a constant formula referring to—God (Theos) our Father and the Lord (Kurios) Jesus Christ. This was the way the New Testament writers were able to say that both the Father and the Son are God and yet are distinguished from each other.

B. Because of His title God.

He is also referred to in the Bible as God. In the Old Testament, Isaiah 9:6 says that the coming Messiah will actually be the Mighty God. In previous messages I've referred to some of the New Testament passages about Jesus being God, such as John 1:1 and John 20:28 and Hebrews 1:8. But there are other passages as well, such as:

> • Romans 9:5: Theirs (referring to the Jewish people) are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen.

• Titus 2:13: …Our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

• 2 Peter 1:1: Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours.

• Philippians 2:6: (Christ was) in very nature God.

C. Because the New Testament from its earliest books assumes the Deity of Christ.

The first books of the New Testament include James, Galatians, and 1 and 2 Thessalonians. All these books have a very high view of the identity of Jesus Christ. And furthermore, the New Testament teaches that Jesus is the mirror image of God. I can illustrate it this way. Right now the European Space Agency is working on one of the most exciting projects in the history of space exploration. European scientists have created a great telescope named Herschel that will be launched into space sometime next year. The Herschel Space Observatory will ultimately reach an orbit of 1.5 million kilometers above the earth (almost a million miles). It contains the largest mirror ever built for a space telescope—3.5 meters in diameter, which is nearly twelve feet). In other words, two people my size could lay across the surface of it. It will collect information and images from the most distant and coldest objects in the universe and reflect them back to earth for us to see and study.

That is something of what Jesus Christ does for us. God the Father is high and holy and lofty. He is immortal and invisible. But Jesus is the mirror image of the invisible God. He reflects the Most High God for us to see. When we see Jesus, we are seeing God. The Bible says exactly that in the following verses:

• 1 Timothy 6:15-16: God (is) the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see.

• John 1:18: No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made Him known.

• John 14:9: (Jesus answered), Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father.

• John 10:30: I and the Father are one.

• 2 Corinthians 4:4-6: The god of this age (Satan) has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made His light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

• Colossians 1:15: He is the image of the invisible God.

• Colossians 2:9: For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form.

• Hebrews 1:3: The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His being.

Let me give you another way of looking at this. Many years ago, there was an unusual evangelist in India known as Sundar Singh. One day in his travels he came to a large river, but there was no boat nearby. There was, however, some kind of large waterskin, like a floatation device or an inner tube. He blew it up, and with it he crossed the river.

Now, Sundar Singh worked among Pantheistic Hindus who believed that God is everywhere, and so he used this floatation device to explain the incarnation of Christ. He said, in effect, that while it's true that God is everywhere, the very fact that God is everywhere means that He's beyond our reach. Just as I filled this floatation device with air, so in Christ all the fullness of the Deity dwells in bodily form. Just as the air became confined to a space that was helpful to me, so God Himself became accessible and helpful to me through Jesus Christ.

D. Because Jesus possesses the attributes and activities that are ascribed to God alone.

• He claimed to be eternal. John 1:1 says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God (Theos) in the beginning." Jesus told His Jewish opponents in John 8:58, "Before Abraham was born, I Am." He is described in the book of Revelation as "the Alpha and the

Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last."

• He is the Almighty Creator of the universe. All things were made by Him and without Him nothing was made that Has been made.

• Jesus exercises omnipotence, stilling the storm with a few words from His mouth, changing water into wine, and even raising the dead. The Bible says that in Him all things consist.

• He possesses omniscience. He knew the thoughts of those around Him and could read their minds as easily as we might read a children's book. In Him are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

• He claims omnipresence, telling us that He is with us even to the end of the world; and where two or three are gathered together there He is among us.

• He exercises the prerogative of forgiving sins. When the four men in Capernaum brought their friend to Jesus, lowering the sick man through the roof, Jesus looked at Him and said, "Your sins are forgiven." The critics said, "Who is this that forgives sin; only God can do that." But Jesus said, in effect, "I have full authority to forgive sin, and also to raise the sick." And with that, He healed the man.

• He accepts worship. One of the clearest spiritual principles of the Old Testament is that only God is to be worshipped, and yet Jesus freely and openly received the worship of His disciples, and even of the angels and heavenly beings in the book of Revelation. "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!" (Revelation 5:12).

2. But Made Himself Nothing

So all this is contained in that incredible phrase in Philippians 2:6: Who, being in very nature God. But now, look at the first part of verse 7: Who made Himself nothing.

He was in very nature God, but He did not insist on clinging to all the perks and prerogatives of Deity. Jesus did not stop being God, but He humbled Himself, leaving the ivory palaces of heaven to enter a world of woe. He came as a baby in Bethlehem. He came as a human being. He came as a servant.

Now, when you look at verses 6 and 7, there is one word that occurs two times. In verse 6, we're told that Jesus had the verynature of God; and in verse 7, we're told that He took upon Himself the nature of a servant and was found in human likeness. Jesus is one person who possesses two natures. He is both God and man.

What we're dealing with in this series of messages are the two greatest mysteries of Christianity—the Trinity and the Duality. Three yet one, and two yet one. The doctrine of the Trinity states that there is one God who eternally exists in three persons. And the doctrine of Jesus Christ states that there is one person who exists with two natures. These two doctrines rest as the foundation to all we believe.

Jesus was and is and always will be God; but with the incarnation He also took upon Himself a human nature, becoming a man, fully human, yet without sin.

This year I read a biography of Pope John XXIII, and I found him to be a fascinating man. He did the unexpected. One day, just after he had been appointed pope, he got into this car with the apparent intention of driving to the Vatican Gardens, but instead the driver swung around suddenly, pulled out the motorcade, sped around St. Peter's Square, and disappeared into the Roman traffic without the benefit of an escort.

Vatican officials were frantic, as were the civil authorities of Rome. Almost instantly, the entire Italian government was in a state of high alert, and the whole country was about to shift into crisis mode. What had happened to the Pope?

As it turned out, he had just decided that he wanted to see an old friend. Word had reached him that a friend of his in a home for old and retired Catholic priests had wanted to see him, but had not asked for an audience, because how could a humble priest request the time of the Holy Father? While the Italian police searched frantically for him, Pope John was sitting serenely in a rocking chair in a nursing home, surrounded by twenty-two old priests, having a lively time of gossiping away the afternoon. (Alden Hatch, A Man Named John: The Life of Pope John XXIII (New York: Hawthorn Books, Inc., 1963), pp. 186-187.)

When I read that story I thought of that remarkable day when the Lord of Glory stunned the angels of heaven by taking an unexpected turn and making the most startling trip in human history. Jesus took the divine motorcade, as it were, to descend to the depths of this earth to spend time with the humble likes of you and me. And He came to die for us, even to experience death on the cross. And in this way He provided redemption for the entire world.

3. Your Attitude Should Be the Same

Now, that leads us to the final phrase I want to look at. The Apostle Paul begins this discussion with these words in verse 5: "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus." In other words, the entire context of Philippians 2 is dealing with humility.

I've been thinking about the grace of humility recently because of a book I've been reading. There was a Scottish man, born in 1828, who ended up becoming a prominent missionary and minister in South Africa. His name was Andrew Murray, and he stressed a ministry of revival. Sometimes he would take off on his horse and be gone weeks at a time, preaching to Dutch-speaking South African farmers. He developed his messages through prayer and Bible study; and in the course of time, he wrote over 240 books and tracts, some of which are still in print today.

Well, one day when he was about my age Murray became ill. He suddenly developed a throat ailment and was unable to speak. For two years, he was virtually silent. And then God healed him. But out of that experience he came to a new level of surrender and humility.

It was some years later that he prepared a series of sermons on the subject of humility. In fact, he was approaching eighty. It's a very difficult and dangerous thing to speak on the subject of humility because by nature none of us are very humble, and when we speak about humility we run the risk of being hypocrites before five words are out of our mouths.

But I've been reading Andrew Murray's book during my devotions, and he has some remarkable insights. Let me just read you some of the sentences I've underlined:

- I stand amazed at the thought of how little humility is sought after as the distinguishing feature of the discipleship of Jesus.
- Humility, the place of entire dependence on God, is, from the very nature of things, the first duty and the highest virtue of the creature, and the root of every virtue. And so pride, or the loss of this humility, is the root of every sin.
- There is nothing so divine and heavenly as being the servant and helper of all. The faithful servant, who recognizes his position, finds a real pleasure in supplying the wants of the master or his guests.
- The humble man feels no jealousy or envy. He can praise God when others are preferred and blessed before him. He can bear to hear others praised and himself forgotten….
- Humility is simply the disposition which prepares the soul for living on trust.
- The holiest will ever be the humblest.

And I think we can take that last point a bit further and create a blessed equation for the Christian. Holiness leads to humility, and humility leads to happiness. When we draw nearer to the Lord and become increasingly like Christ, growing in personal holiness, we'll be increasingly humble and Christlike, eager to serve others, eager to trust the Lord in simple childlike dependency. And as that happens, the envy and anxiety that so frustrates us will melt away like dirty snow in the springtime sun, and we'll be happier and healthier.

Within the Trinity, all Three members—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—are co-equal and co-equally God. They are of the same essence. They receive the same glory. They all share the same power. They are all infinitely and eternally God. And yet, when the world needed redemption, Jesus didn't cling to the prerogatives of deity, but took upon Himself the form of a servant. He was subordinate in His position, but His subordination did not diminish His dignity. There is rank and role in the Trinity, yet all are equally and infinitely God.

And the reverberations of that can change our hearts in a way that produces holiness, humbleness, happiness, and healthiness.

That's the answer to feelings of failure when we don't achieve all our vocational or financial goals. That's the answer when we get the bronze medal or no medal at all. Our identity is in Christ, and in Him alone is our value and validity

ONE THING I DO
Philippians 3:1-15
Robert Morgan

All of us in America as well as people all around the world have been processing the shock and grief over the loss of the seven astronauts aboard the space shuttle Columbia. One of the hardest hit communities was Grace Community Church in suburbanHouston. Two of the astronauts were members there, along with their families: Rick Husband, commander of the Columbia, and Michael Anderson, the payload specialist. This week I saw something in the newspapers that Rick Husband had said about his faith in Jesus Christ, and it serves as a good introduction for my message today.

He said that he had desperately wanted to be an astronaut, but when he was first interviewed by NASA in 1992, he wasn't hired. He and his wife moved to England for an exchange assignment with the Royal Air Force, and during that time he began really focusing on his daily quiet times—his morning periods of personal Bible study and prayer. One morning he found Psalm 37:4: "Commit your way to the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart."

He said that suddenly felt that God was asking him, "Okay, Rick, so what really are the desires of your heart?" He said, "Lord, I want to be an astronaut." But Rick said that He could almost hear the Lord responding, "No, no, no. Think about it for a little while and tell me what really is the desire of your heart."

Rick said, "I got to thinking about it, and I thought, well, if I ended up at the end of my life having been an astronaut but having sacrificed my family along the way or living my life in a way that didn't glorify God, then I would look back on it with great regret, and having become an astronaut would not really have mattered all that much.

"I finally came to realize that what really meant the most to me was to try and live my life the way God wanted me to, and to try and be a good husband to Evelyn and be a good father to my children and do everything that I possibly could to make sure that they knew who Jesus was, and that they had every opportunity to make a choice themselves for Jesus.

"It was like a light came on all of a sudden, where I finally realized that this thing about being an astronaut was not as important as I thought it was. I finally came to the point where I said, 'Okay Lord, I don't care what I do, or where you send me. I just want to try and do those things. I want to live a life that glorifies you, and be a good husband and good father. And come what may the way the rest of it goes."

My message today is entitled, "One Thing I Do," and it goes to that very issue. What really is the desire of our hearts? If we can do only one thing in life, what one thing must we do? The answer is given in our passage today, Philippians 3:1-15:

> Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you.
>
> Watch out for those dogs, those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh. For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh— though I myself have reasons for such confidence.
>
> If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people ofIsrael, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.
>
> But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.
>
> I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.
>
> Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that

for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. All of us who are mature should take such a view of things.

What is the one thing we MUST do? We must know Jesus Christ and let Him be Lord of our lives. Look at the key phrase in this passage, found in verse 8: knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. In the final analysis, everything else in life depends on this, and nothing is more important. In this extended passage, Paul gives us four aspects of knowing Christ Jesus our Lord.

Look Up

First, it means looking up: "Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord!"

This is one of the great themes of this book of Philippians. The apostle Paul was imprisoned in Rome, writing to Christians who were being persecuted in the city of Philippi, but all the way through this letter he kept using the words joy and rejoicing.

Do you know that happiness and health are related? The Bible says so. Proverbs 17:22 says, "A cheerful heart is good medicine." We can't always rejoice in our circumstances, but if Christ is our Lord, we can always rejoice in the Lord.

- We can rejoice in the Lord's presence.
- We can rejoice in the Lord's promises.
- We can rejoice in the Lord's providential control of our lives.
- We can rejoice in the Lord's pardon and provision.

And so the apostle Paul begins his discussion here by reminding us to be cheerful and to look up, to have a cheerful heart.

Watch Out

Then he tells us to watch out. Look at Php 3:2: Watch out for those dogs….

This is a little shocking us, to realize that the greatest missionary in Christian history was upset enough to call other people "dogs," but Paul was gravely concerned about some false teachers who were trying to ruin his work by supplanting his doctrine with heresy. Let's continue reading: Watch out for those dogs, those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh. For it is we who are the circumcision….

Here Paul is lambasting a group of people that we call the Judaizers. These were men who were teaching that salvation depended on faith in Jesus Christ PLUS something. Plus the Jewish rite of circumcision. Plus keeping the Sabbath. Plus observing Jewish dietary requirements.

Paul went on to say that if anyone in the world could be saved by being a good Jew and by observing the Jewish law, it would have been him. If anyone could be saved by living a strict and productive life, it would have been him:

…circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.

But none of those things advanced him spiritually. None of those things made him right with God. None of those things could have taken him to heaven. Even after he had done his best and tried his hardest, he still would have been an imperfect human being, unworthy of the perfections and glories of heaven.

It was only in Christ—and in Christ alone—that he could be saved and have eternal life.

But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.

You can I can never be saved by trying to do enough good deeds to persuade God to let us into His perfect heaven. It is only through the merits of the shed blood of Christ that we are reconciled to God and have eternal life. As the Bible puts it in Ephesians 2: we are justified by grace through faith, not of works.

So Paul said: Look up and watch out. And then…

Draw Near

> Php 3:10: I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

This is one of the deepest verses in the New Testament, and I do not yet know all that this verse implies. I don't fully understand it. But I do know this: At the time of this writing, Paul had been a Christian for approximately thirty years. He had known Christ for three decades, since their rendezvous on the Damascus Road in Acts 9. Paul had grown and advanced in the faith from day to day, and from year to year. But he still wanted to know Christ better. He still wanted a deeper identification with Christ and His death and resurrection.

The other day I listened to a sermon I preached back in the 1970s—one of my first sermons, and it was on this text. I talked about the dynamics of knowing another person. Sometimes a man or woman will say, "I don't know my husband anymore," or "I don't know my wife." Young people tell me, "I just don't know my parents." They don't mean they haven't met the person, but that the sense of intimacy and identification with that person is gone. They have drawn apart.

That can happen with the Lord. But Paul said, "It isn't going to happen to me." The Amplified Bible put this verse like this: For my determined purpose is that I may know Him—that I may progressively become more deeply and intimately acquainted with Him, perceiving and recognizing and understanding the wonders of His person more strongly and more clearly.

And that leads us to Paul's fourth aspect of knowing Christ as Lord—pressing on.

Press On

> Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

All of us who are mature should take such a view of things.

Paul described his Christian life twice here, using the term pressing on. The Greek word, dioko, means to chase after, to pursue or follow with haste. This is the word the Greeks used to describe someone chasing you. We watched a movie the other night with an exciting chase scene through the streets of Paris, and so many of our popular movies have chase scenes. I remember when I was a child I used to coax myself to run faster by pretending someone was chasing me.

Well, in biblical times this was the word they used. Jesus used this word dioko to describe how His followers would be pursued from town to town by those wanting to destroy them. And in Revelation 12, this word is used to describe the way Satan chased the newborn Christchild in an effort to destroy Him.

Paul was using this word to describe the intensity with which we should pursue our relationship with Christ. We've got to be determined to press on.

Do you have a problem with some weakness or flaw in your life? You've almost given up? Don't give up! Be determined, with God's help, to overcome it.

Have you tried over and over again to have your daily quiet time? Are you ready to give up! Don't give up. Be determined, with God's help, to succeed.

Have you tried over and over again to trust God with that anxious care? Are you ready to throw in the towel? Don't do it. Be determined, and sooner or later you'll work through to victory.

The Bible says:

> Never give up. Eagerly follow the Holy Spirit and serve the Lord. (Romans 12:11, CEV)
> Even when we don't know what to do, we never give up. (2 Corinthians 4:7, CEV)
> We never give up. Our bodies are gradually dying, but we ourselves are being made stronger each day. (2 Corinthians 4:16,

CEV)

Always pray and not give up. (Luke 18:1, NIV)

Some years ago, I read the remarkable account of when Captain Eddie Rickenbacker and his men were ditched at sea and had to survive many days in a lifeboat before being rescued. Their survival was a miracle. Rickenbacker later said, “My mother, a very poor woman in Columbus, Ohio, taught her kids to pray, to read the Bible, to follow Jesus Christ and never to give up.”

Recently in my study of the biblical names of Jesus, I noticed that He was sometimes called Rabbi. It means “Teacher.” The implication is that we are His life-long learners. One of my favorite stories is about the teacher with twenty years experience who was passed over for a promotion. Going to the administrator, she demanded, “Why did you choose that new young man who only had four years of experience at this job, when I have twenty years of experience?”

The man answered, “Because you do not have twenty years of experience. You have one year of experience twenty times. You’re still teaching the same things in the same way as you did when you were first hired. You haven’t grown in the job.”

Christ intends for us to grow in the job.

How does Rabbi Jesus bring immature people to maturity? His textbook is the Scripture. As we study His Word each day, memorizing and meditating on its chapters and verses, He shows us where and how we need to mature. His classroom is trouble. We do our best maturing when we’re confronting the trials and tribulations of life. His tool is time. The process of physical maturation doesn’t occur overnight. A child grows so slowly that daily growth is virtually unobservable. But over the years, growth—or the lack of it—is obvious. Spiritual and emotional maturing is the same.

Our responsibility is to look up, to watch out, to draw near, and to press on, putting Him first and everything else way down on the list. He is to be Lord. Paul wrote, What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.

What does it mean that Jesus Christ is Lord? As the New Testament authors wrote it in the original Greek, the word was kurios (ku-ri’-os), but when Jerome translated the New Testament into Latin, and the word became dominus. From that come several well-known English words, including Dominant—and Dominoes. Dominoes?

The Dominicus monks reportedly loved this game in earlier centuries. Wearing their domino-like black and white hoods, they would call out the Latin word Dominium, meaning Dominate, whenever they had used their last tile and won the game. Another version of the story says that the monks would play this game during periods of silence when they could only say the words, “Benedicamus domino”—Let us bless the Lord. They would shout out those words to announce that they had won the game, and it became a sort of oath.

But the Lordship of Christ is not a game or an oath. It isn’t an optional doctrine or something to be trifled with. In Matthew 7:21, Jesus warned, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,” shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.”

There’s no gentle way to put it. The nature of Lordship is domination, and Christ wants to dominate our lives, to dominate our thinking, to dominate our affections, to dominate our schedules, to dominate our attitudes. Not in aggressive hostility, but in loving wisdom.

Is Christ everything to you? Is there anything that comes before the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus as your Lord? Is a boyfriend or girlfriend more important to you than Christ? Is a goal or an ambition more real to you right now than the Lord Jesus Himself?

Or can you say—one thing I do. Forgetting what is behind I press toward the mark of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus? Are you determined to live for Christ, come what may, whatever it means? Looking up… watching out… drawing near… pressing on!

“Brothers, said Paul, “I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”

All of us who are mature should take such a view of things.

WE'RE MADE TO BRING GOD PLEASURE
Philippians 2:12-13
Robert Morgan

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure (Philippians 2:12-13).

Abraham Maslow, who is considered one of the founders of humanistic psychology, developed many theories about human personality and behavior. One of his insights had to do with the role that purpose plays in human longevity. He found that both the quality and quantity of life are affected by a person's sense of purpose. If, for example, at mid-life, a person feels a strong sense of mission and purpose, he or she will on average live longer than those who don't have such a sense of purpose.

Viktor Frankl reached a similar conclusion. He was the famous psychologist who survived the terrors on a Nazi death camp, and afterward he wrote a profound book called Man's Search for Meaning. Among his conclusions is that the inmates in the death camps who had a sense of purpose and meaning in life handled stress better and were far more likely to survive than those who didn't.

The great Christian writer, A. W. Tozer, devotes a chapter to this subject in his book Whatever Happened to Worship. The chapter is entitled "Born to Worship God," and it's so good I almost decided to read his chapter to you today instead of preaching. In this chapter, he told a story. He said that he was waiting one day on a bench in front of City Hall when a stranger approached him. The man looked at him and smiled, but he seemed a little bewildered. Tozer said, "Do we know each other?" The man replied, "No, I don't think so. I think I am in some kind of a jam."

He went on: "Something has happened to me. I think I tripped and fell somewhere in the city and bumped my head. I cannot remember anything for sure. When I woke up I had been robbed. My wallet and all of my cards and papers were gone. I have no identification—and I do not know who I am."

Tozer was just about to take the man to the police station when another man nearby let out a sudden shout and rushed over to the man and called him by name. "Where have you been and what have you been doing?"

The lost man looked at him strangely and said, "Do we know each other?"

"What? You don't know me? We came to Toronto together three days ago. Don't you know that we are members of the Philharmonic and that you are first violinist? We have filled our engagement without you and we have been searching everywhere for you!"

"Ah," said the man, "so that's who I am and that is why I am here!"

Tozer went on to say that the poor man in the story is emblematic of the human race. Many years ago, our forefather Adam had a fall and received a terrible bump. And ever since then, men and women on this planet have been walking around in a fog, not knowing who they are and why they are here. That's why there is so much confusion in life, so much despair, so many addictions, so much entertainment, amusement, and diversions. But to be healthy and whole in life, we must have a clear sense of who we are and why we are here.

According to Rick Warren, we have five purposes, and today we're going to look at the first and foremost purpose for which we are made: To bring pleasure to God—to worship Him.

The Westminster Catechism begins with the question: "What is the chief and highest end of man?" And the answer is: "Man's chief and highest end is to glorify God, and fully to enjoy him forever."

John Calvin wrote a catechism in 1537 and the first article said: "We are all created for this end, that we should know the majesty of our Creator and that, having known him, we should hold him above all things in esteem and honor him with all fear, love, and reverence."

The Apostle Paul put it this way in Philippians 2: Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure (Philippians 2:12-13).

In other words, God wants to work in you and me, giving us the desire to bring Him pleasure and the ability to bring Him pleasure. He works in us both to will and to do His good pleasure. There is a sense in which worship can be defined as doing that which brings God pleasure. We are made to will and to do His good pleasure. How do we do that? Well, there are many ways, but I want to mention four of them this morning.

Experience His Pardon

First, to bring God pleasure we must experience His pardon. We must receive His forgiveness. Suppose that my wife and I wanted to adopt a youngster who had been abandoned by his mother. Suppose we had visited with him, we had fallen in love with him, and our hearts had gone out to him. Suppose we were ready to open our home to him. Suppose we fixed up the spare bedroom, processed through all the paperwork, and suppose we were prepared to love him just as much or more than we could love our own flesh-and-blood children. This would be a child whom we could please and who, in turn, could bring us great pleasure. But what if, at the last moment, the young man turned on us and said, “I don’t want to bring you pleasure. I want to break your heart. I don’t want your love or your home or your bedroom. You can keep your adoption papers. I’d rather live on the streets and in the gutter than to be adopted by you.” Well, we would be hurt and heartbroken. If, on the other hand, he received our invitation and came into our home and hearts, he would become a source of great pleasure.

I want to show you something in the first chapter of Ephesians: Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will….

God wants to adopt us, as it were, into His family according to the good pleasure of His will!

And down in verses 7ff: In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure….

See those two phrases? We are orphaned by sin, but God wants to adopt us as His children. He wants to bring us into His family. He wants to do it according to the good pleasure of His will… according to His good pleasure. It breaks the heart of God when we reject His offer of adoption and forgiveness and grace. But it brings Him great pleasure when we receive it and enter the joys of His home. He saves us according to His good pleasure.

Jesus said: “Fear not, little flock, for it is the Father’s good pleasure to give you the Kingdom.”

Sing His Praises

It also brings pleasure to God when, as His adopted children, we sing His praises. Let’s go to Psalm 149. The writer here says:

Praise the Lord!

Sing to the Lord a new song, and His praise in the assembly of the saints. Let Israel rejoice in their Maker; let the children of Zion be joyful in their King. Let them praise His name with dance; let them sing praises to Him with the timbrel and harp. For the Lord takes pleasure in His people; He will beautify the humble with salvation.

Let the saints be joyful in glory; Let them sing aloud on their beds. Let the high praises of God be in their mouth, and a two-edged sword in their hand, to execute vengeance on the nations, and punishments on the peoples; to bind their kings with chains, and their nobles with fetters of iron; to execute on them the written judgment—this honor have all His saints.

Praise the Lord!

Do you see that phrase? The Lord takes pleasure in His people; He gains great pleasure when we sing and praise Him in the great assemblies of worship.

The Psalmist tells us to sing to the Lord a new song. What does that mean? The Bible tells us on nine different occasions to sing to the Lord a new song. That phrase occurs six times in the Psalms, once in Isaiah, and two times in the book of Revelation.

It seems to me there are two ways to sing to the Lord a new song. One is to keep writing and singing new music. I get a lot of letters and e-mails because of my book Then Sings My Soul, and the other day a man wrote to thank me for writing the stories of the great old hymns. He said, "I just can't stand all this new music with the drums and everything. I just want to sing the old songs." I wrote back to him and told him that I love the old hymns, too, but that he should think about this. If there ever comes a generation of believers that doesn't write its own music to the Lord, Christianity is dead. Every generation of Christians—if their faith is living—expresses their faith with original songs that flow from their hearts. We need to sing the old songs, but we also need to sing the new ones. Sing a new song to the Lord.

I think it also means that every time we sing to the Lord, our song should be fresh and new and real. We should never just repeat words out of routine, but every song should be special. Years ago my friend Vernon Whaley was scheduled to sing a solo here. I think it was on a Sunday night. He began the solo, but about a verse into the song he stopped. "I want to start this song again," he said. "I realize I was just singing through the words without thinking about them, and I don't want to do that. I want to sing from my mind and heart, not just with my voice."

When we sing like that, every song is new. It's fresh every time; and it can make a powerful statement. I received a wonderful letter last week from a woman in Minnesota who wrote something that delighted me. She said, "My mother tells me that when she was nursing me, she sang all the way through the Lutheran hymnal, start to finish." Not surprisingly, the woman went on to describe how the great hymns and songs of the church have been a strength and comfort to her through the years, from her childhood. I think God is delighted with that. He takes pleasure in his people.

The Psalmist says: Sing to the Lord a new song, and His praise in the assembly of the saints. Let Israel rejoice in their Maker; let the children of Zion be joyful in their King. Let them praise His name with dance; let them sing praises to Him with the timbrel and harp. For the Lord takes pleasure in His people; He will beautify the humble with salvation.

Obey His Precepts

Third, we worship God and bring Him pleasure when we obey His precepts. I'd like to show you something that King David said in 1 Chronicles 29. He was an old man when he rose for the last time and, with aged voice, gave his last public speech. It was on the occasion of the great freewill offering given by the people of Israel for the building of the First Temple. David said: "O Lord our God, all this abundance that we have prepared to build You a house for Your holy name is from Your hand, and is all Your own. I know also, my God, that You test the heart and have pleasure in uprightness."

God has pleasure in uprightness. In other words, when you're tempted to sin, but by His grace you resist—that brings Him pleasure. When you have the opportunity of doing something in obedience to Him and you do it, that brings Him pleasure. That's an act of worship.

Psalm 5:4 says: "You are not a god who takes pleasure in wickedness." But Psalm 147:11 says: "The Lord takes pleasure in those who fear Him, in those who hope in His mercy."

Hebrews 10 says that the Lord takes no pleasure in sacrifices and burnt offerings, but in those who come to do His will.

Practice His Presence

Finally, the Lord takes pleasure when we practice His presence. Zephaniah 3:17 says: The Lord your God in your midst, the Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness. He will quiet you with His love. He will rejoice over you with singing.

God is delighted when we practice His presence and walk with Him in daily fellowship. Too often we build a wall between the secular and the sacred. We talk about our secular lives and about our religious lives. When we work at the gym or mow the lawn or go to work, that's secular. When we come to church, that's sacred. But in God's sight, there is no such wall. As Christians, we constantly live in His presence, and we're always on holy ground. Everything we do is sacred. Everything we do is an act of worship. Everything we do should be designed for His glory.

This is what "Brother Lawrence" discovered. His real name was Nicholas Herman (pronounced är-män'), and he was born in Lorraine, France, in 1605. Little is known of his early life, but he was converted at age 18 and he went to work as a footman for a local official in the treasury. Years passed, and at age fifty Nicholas joined a Carmelite monastery in Paris where he was dubbed Brother Lawrence and assigned to the kitchen, a task that struck him as insulting and humbling. For the next several years, he went

about his chores, miserable but dutifully, until gradually recognizing his unhealthy attitude.

He then began reminding himself frequently that God's presence continually hovered about him, and his disposition changed. Even the most menial tasks, Lawrence realized, if undertaken for God's glory, are holy; and wherever the Christian stands--even in a hot, thankless kitchen--is holy ground, for the Lord is there, too. Many more years passed, and Brother Lawrence's countenance and demeanor gradually changed until others began asking him a reason for his radiance. He was sought out and his advice valued.

Here's what Brother Lawrence said: "The time of business does not with me differ from the time of prayer, and in the noise and clatter of my kitchen, while several persons are at the same time calling for different things, I possess God in as great tranquility as if I were upon my knees at the blessed sacrament."

In other words, every moment of the day and every duty of our lives are holy and sacred when we're living for the Lord and practicing His presence.

It reminds me of a lady I know who has a plaque over her kitchen sink that says, "Divine Service Conducted Here Three Times a Day."

Colossians 3:23 says: And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men. Rick Warren points out that when we really understand that verse, it will revolutionize our lives. It says: and whatever you do….

In other words, if you want to worship the Lord more you don't have to enter a monastery like Brother Lawrence. It isn't just a matter of having your quiet times and coming to church, though those are important things to do. There really is only one thing we have to do. We must change who we are working for. Too many of us are working for someone else or we're working for ourselves, but Colossians 3:23 says: And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men. In other words, in this life it isn't what you do that matters, but who you do it for. It doesn't matter if you are a butcher, a baker, or a candlestick maker. You might be a factory worker, a school teacher, or an executive. Whatever you do, do it for the Lord. We must say, "God, I'm going to teach these children for you. God, I'm going to file these papers for you. God, I'm going to drive this truck for you. God, I'm going to post these accounts for you."

Romans 12:2 says in the Message: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, your eating, your going to work, your walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering.

Isn't that wonderful? Tomorrow you can go back to that same old job that you've had for ten years, but you'll have a different boss. You'll have a different perspective. You'll be working for the Lord and not for men. And all of life becomes a doxology. All of life is an act of worship. All of life is a means of bringing pleasure to God.

That's our first great purpose in life. Jesus said, "The greatest commandment is the love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength."

Are you doing what you were made to do? We worship God by bringing Him pleasure, and we bring Him pleasure by…

- Experiencing His pardon
- Singing His praises
- Obeying His precepts, and
- Practicing His presence.

So work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works within us, both to will and to do His good pleasure.

God's Alternative To Worry
Philippians 4:4-9
Robert Morgan

Recently I received a brochure in the mail advertising a variety of management seminars that are being held around the country. For a particular fee, I could learn five ways to better manage my time, eight ways to better handle multiple priorities, three master secrets

of improving customer relations, and seven ways to close a sale when the customer says "No."

As I thumbed through the brochure, I was again reminded how we like our information given to us in short, concise, numerical steps. Three ways to do this. Five steps to that. Four master secrets to doing one thing or another. Of course, maturity and wisdom cannot always be conveyed in simple, little formulas. But I'm happy to say that there is one passage in the Bible in which the Apostle Paul sounds like a modern-day lecturer leading a seminar entitled Five Ways To Overcome Worry and Anxiety in Your Life.

This morning I'd like us to enroll in the Apostle's seminar and discover these five ways of beating worry and anxiety, by reading Philippians 4:4-9:

> Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

The other night I went to bed worried about something or another, and during the night I had troubling dreams. I dreamed that someone I loved had committed a murder and was running from the law, and the whole thing was quite literally a nightmare. I awoke the next morning tired, but resolved to get myself into a better state of mind during my morning devotions. And so I turned to this familiar and beloved passage, and discovered again its five techniques for overcoming anxiety.

Rejoice in the Lord

First, we are to rejoice in the Lord. This is not a phrase that Paul himself invented or coined. He was simply quoting the Old Testament:

- Rejoice in the Lord and be glad, you righteous—Psalm 32
- Let the righteous rejoice in the Lord and take refuge in him—Psalm 64
- May my meditations be pleasing to Him as I rejoice in the Lord—Psalm 104
- Rejoice in the Lord your God; for he has given you the autumn rains—Joel 2
- Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior—Habakkuk 3

In these Old Testament passages, the primary Hebrew word used for rejoice is simhah, which has as its root meaning, to shine, to be bright. So the biblical phrase "Rejoice in the Lord" could well be translated "Brighten up in the Lord always; and again I say brighten up!"

And it's a command. Put on a happy face. Smile. Lift up your countenance. I read somewhere that when you make yourself smile, the very act of smiling lifts your spirits and makes it easier for you to pull out of discouragement. Ecclesiastes 8:1 says: "Wisdom brightens a person's face and changes its hard appearance." Proverbs 15:30 says, "A cheerful look brings joy to the heart."

You say, "I don't have anything to smile about." Oh? You may not be able to rejoice in your load, but you can rejoice in the Lord. You may have no joy in your situation, but you can rejoice in your Savior. You may be encased in shadows, but you can still walk in the light as He is in the light. To rejoice in the Lord means that we rejoice in our unassailable, unchanging relationship with the Sovereign Lord and in his qualities, gifts, promises, and attributes.

Deuteronomy 26:11 says we should rejoice in all the Lord's good gifts. 2 Chronicles 6:41 says we should rejoice in God's goodness. Psalm 9:14 says we should rejoice in his salvation. Psalm 31:7 says we should rejoice in his love. Psalm 89:16 says that we can rejoice in his name all day long. Psalm 119:14 tells us to rejoice in following his statutes as one rejoices in great riches. Psalm 119:162 tells us to rejoice in God's promises. Isaiah 65:18 tells us to rejoice forever in what God has created. Jeremiah 31:12 tells us to rejoice in the bounty of the Lord. And Romans 5:2 tells us to rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

And so Paul tells us that the first step to overcoming the stranglehold of worry in our lives is to make up our mind to rejoice in the Lord always. It's hard to be fretting when we're rejoicing.

Be Gentle

As a second step in overcoming anxiety, Paul recommends a gentle, debonair demeanor. He was writing these words to the congregation he had started in the great city of Philippi. The Philippian church was one of the strongest and dearest in the New Testament. They were very generous, and they sent financial aid to the Apostle Paul time and again. But there was some internal

strife within the church. Paul alludes to it several times in this letter, and in the passage immediately before the one we're studying, he brings it out in the open: "I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you, loyal yokefellow, help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life."

In putting all this together, here's what we have. One of the major reasons for stress, worry, and anxiety in our lives is conflict and tension with other people. Most of the things we worry about involve interpersonal relationships in one way or another. Perhaps you're not getting along with your boss. Perhaps you're out of sorts with your co-workers. Perhaps someone at school is trying to make your life miserable. Maybe there is tension between you and your spouse or your parents or your children.

Well, we may not be able to put out all the fires, but we can usually lower the temperature by being gentle with one another. Proverbs 15:1 says, "A soft answer turns away wrath." Ephesians 4:2 says, "Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Paul told Timothy to gently instruct those who opposed him. He told the Galatians to gently restore those who had fallen. Peter wrote that we should always be ready to give an answer to everyone who asks us a reason for the hope that is within us, but we should do with gentleness and respect. The Bible says that the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, kindness, gentleness...

Being gentle doesn't mean being weak or fragile. It just means that we are moderate in our reactions, we temper our responses, we try to see things from the other person's point of view, and we act and speak out of maturity and love. When we do that, it tends to reduce stress in our interpersonal relationships, and that lowers the levels of anxiety and worry we bear.

Remember the Nearness of the Lord

The third step in overcoming worry is to remember the nearness of our Lord. Verse 5b says: "The Lord is near." Now there are two possible ways to interpret this. It could refer to either time or space. Paul may have meant that the Lord's coming in near in terms of time. Or he might have meant that the Lord's presence is near us all the time. Both are true, but it seems to me that the second is preferable. We don't need to worry, for our Lord is with us, near us, all around us.

A man told me the other day that he used to worry himself sick over his brother in another state who is drinking heavily and in trouble. Finally he found the verse in Isaiah 59 that says, "Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear." God seemed to say, "I know you're worried about your brother, but I am omnipresent, and I can be where you cannot be. My arm is not too short to save. Remain concerned for your brother and pray for him; but leave the worrying to me."

A woman who lives alone recently told me that she has little sense of living alone, for the presence of the Lord is so constant. "I never feel that the house is empty. I never come home to an empty house, for the Lord lives there with me," she said. "He is always near, and I talk to him whenever I feel like it, frequently, throughout the day."

Recently I found a hymnbook that contained an old prayer by St. Patrick, the famous British missionary to Ireland in the fourth century. It became such a famous petition that Irish Christians have prayed it now for 1600 years, believing that its words, honored by God, protect from demons, human enemies, and the like. A part of the prayer refers to the Lord Jesus Christ in this way:

> Christ be with me, Christ within me,
> Christ behind me, Christ before me,
> Christ beside me, Christ to win me;
> Christ to comfort and restore me;
> Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
> Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,
> Christ in hearts of all that love me,
> Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.

The Psalmist referred to God as one who hemmed him in before and behind; Moses spoke of God as the one who went before and who followed. Paul said that our lives are hidden with Christ in God. Jesus said, "I am with you always." James said, "Draw near to God and he will draw near to you." One of the great secrets of overcoming anxiety is to practice the presence of the Lord, day by day, moment by moment. And, of course, the primary way of practicing God's presence is to pray. Deuteronomy 4:7 says, "What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the Lord our God is near us whenever we pray to him?"

Pray with Thanksgiving

The fourth step to overcoming worry is in verses 6 and 7:

> "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your

> requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."

The Living Bible put it,

> "Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything; tell God your needs and don't forget to thank him for his answers. If you do this you will experience God's peace, which is far more wonderful than the human mind can understand."

When Franklin Graham, the oldest son of Billy and Ruth Graham, was living a wild and dangerous life, Ruth found herself torn apart by worry. One night while she was abroad, she suddenly awoke in the middle of the night worrying about Franklin. A current of worry surged through her like an electric shock. She lay in bed and tried to pray, but she suffered from galloping anxiety, one fear piling upon another. She looked at the clock and it was around three o'clock. She was exhausted, yet she knew she would be unable to go back to sleep. Suddenly the Lord seemed to say to her, "Quit studying the problems and start studying the promises."

She turned on the light, got out her Bible, and the first verses that came to her were these, Philippians 4:6-7. As she read those words, she suddenly realized that the missing ingredient in her prayers had been thanksgiving. "...in everything by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God."

She put down her Bible and spent time worshipping God for who and what he is. She later wrote, "I began to thank God for giving me this one I loved so dearly in the first place. I even thanked him for the difficult spots which had taught me so much. And you know what happened? It was as if someone turned on the light in my mind and heart, and the little fears and worries that had been nibbling away in the darkness like mice and cockroaches hurriedly scuttled for cover. That was when I learned that worship and worry cannot live in the same heart. They are mutually exclusive."

The Bible says that we can cast all our cares on him, for he cares for us.

Meditation On What is Excellent & Praiseworthy

Paul's final technique for overcoming worry is to meditate on what is excellent and praiseworthy. Verses 8-9 say: "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you."

Since worry and anxiety are conditions of the mind, one of the best remedies is to push them aside with healthier thoughts. Romans 12 says that we are transformed by the renewing of our minds. Isaiah said, "Thou will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee." Learn to memorize and meditate on Scripture.

Recently I found myself so worried about a particular situation that I had trouble sleeping. I finally decided I would begin reading the book of Deuteronomy to see if there might be some word from the Lord there that would give my mind a sense of rest and peace. Deuteronomy is, after all, a very underestimated book. I had no sooner started when I came to the passage in Deuteronomy, chapter 1, in which Moses was recounting to the younger Israelis the terrible sin which condemned their parents' generation to wandering for 40 years in the wilderness. They had sent spies into Canaan to spy out the land, and the 12 spies had returned with astounding news. The inhabitants of Canaan were large and powerful, the cities strong and well defended. Moses, in telling the story, said:

/But you were unwilling to go up; you rebelled against the command of the Lord your God. You grumbled in your tents and said, "The Lord hates us; so he brought us out of Egypt to deliver us into the hands of the Ammonites to destroy us. Where can we go? Our brothers have made us lose heart. They say, "The people are stronger and taller than we are; the cities are large; with walls up to the sky. We even saw the Anakites there."

Then I said to you, "Do not be terrified; do not be afraid of them. The Lord your God, who is going before you, will fight for you, as he did for you in Egypt before your very eyes, and in the desert. There you saw how the Lord your God carried you, as a father carries his son, all the way you went until you reached this place."

In spite of this, you did not trust the Lord your God, who went ahead of you on your journey, in fire by night and in a cloud by day, to search out places for you to camp and to show you the way you should go. When the Lord heard what you said, he was angry..."

As I read those words, I seemed to realize that the basic sin of the Israelites, the sin that had so angered the Lord that he forbade them entering the Promised Land, was the sin of worry—of fear, panic, and unbelief. They distrusted his promises, they disregarded his power, and they discounted his presence among them.

Is that not the very essence of worry? To distrust God's promises, disregard his presence, and discount his power? Do we want to

wander around all our lives in the wilderness of worry? I live in constant danger of doing that; but by studying and meditating on this passage, I was strengthened to be more of a Joshua or Caleb.

Here's another example. I just finished reading the biography of Geoffery Bull, the British missionary to Tibet who was captured and imprisoned by Chinese Communists. They took his possessions, threw him in a series of prisons, robbed him of his Bible, and he suffered terribly at their hands for three years.

How did he keep his mind at peace? He had no Bible, but he had studied the Bible all his life. So he began to systematically go over the Scriptures in his mind. He found it took him about six months to go all the way through the Bible mentally. He started at Genesis, and recalled each incident and story as best he could, first concentrating on the content and then musing on certain points, seeking light in prayer. He continued through the Old Testament, reconstructing the books and chapters as best he could, then into the New Testament and on to Revelation. Then he started over again. He later wrote, "The strength received through this meditation was, I believe, a vital factor in bringing me through, kept by the faith to the very end."

It reminds me of the story of American POW Howard Rutlage who was imprisoned for seven years in North Vietnam. He said that he survived the years of torture by reconstructing verses of Scripture that he had memorized as a child.

So if you are struggling with worry, today, take the Bible's advice: Rejoice in the Lord always. Let your gentleness be evident to all. Remember that the Lord is near. Don't worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And set your mind on those things that are excellent and praiseworthy. And the God of peace will be with

THE PRACTICE OF GENTLENESS
Philippians 4:4-9
Robert Morgan

Richard and Arlene Baughman were married in 1940, just before America entered World War II. Richard was drafted in 1942, and he left for the war just a few weeks after the birth of their first son. He was unable to communicate very much with his family for over a year, and when he returned to his Wisconsin home he bore the scars of post-traumatic stress from combat experiences. He had a lot of bad dreams. But he and Arlene picked up where they left off, and in the years since they have faced everything together. Richard worked as a mail carrier and farmer. Arlene was a schoolteacher. They lived a busy life and raised six children, one of whom has passed away. Over the years the Baughmans have encountered all the stresses and strains that come with life—just like you and me. But here's what sets them apart. Recently this couple celebrated their seventy-fifth anniversary. Richard is now 97 and Arlene is 96. Somehow their story got out, and they've been in the news—especially because of something almost unbelievable testimony. In seventy-five years of marriage, they said, they have never had one single argument. Not one. "If we had differences we just talked about it," they said. "We didn't have dishes to throw or shoes to throw because we couldn't afford it. So, we had to get along."1 They explained that whenever they felt angry they would give themselves time to cool off before talking it through; and they've always taken time for regular dates and for occasional trips and vacations. They've worked hard, lived simply, not coveted too much, and have tried not to complain to each other. "The couple's advice for a happy marriage," said a reporter who interviewed them, "is to not fret over the small things and to keep faith in the Lord alive."2

To me, that's the living embodiment of the verse we're coming to in our study of Philippians 4:4-9. This passage tells us how to avoid fretting over things large and small, and how to keep our faith in the Lord alive. This is the Bible's most definitive text on the subject of anxiety, and in this passage the Lord gives us His eight-point plan for personal peace.

> Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

Last week we looked at the first step—rejoicing. We have to make up our mind to count it all joy, to rejoice always, to live a life of determined, God-based joy. The rejoicing life, we said, represented a command to obey, a choice to make, an attitude to cultivate, and a climate to create. Now we're coming to the next phrase in the passage: "Let your gentleness be evident to all" (verse 5a). If you want to lower your anxiety and stress in life, learn to exercise a gentler personality. Cultivate the art of gentleness.

What Is Gentleness? What does it mean to be gentle? I looked up this word in the dictionary and was surprised to find the primary definitions were negative. The definitions largely talked about what gentleness is not. Gentleness means: not severe, not rough, not violent. It refers to the absence of a bad temper or of belligerence. People who are gentle are not harsh, they are not irritable, petulant, or easily offended. Perhaps none of us think of ourselves in those terms, but how do others see us? Is it possible we're more inconsiderate or rigid than we think we are?

But, of course, you can't simply define something by what it's not, so in seeking a positive definition we should look at the etymology or the origin of the English term. Notice that opening syllable—gen. This word comes from the same Latin term from which we get the words Genesis, genetics, generation. It has to do with begetting a family. It all has to do with being part of the same family or clan. So the word "gentle" originally had to do with the way a mother or father would treat a newborn. It has to do with the way people treat those whom they love, who are part of their own family. From this Latin origin, the term passed into the French language, where the Old French version was gentil, which meant born into a good family, highborn, noble. And from there it came into our English language where it means moderate and tender and kind. It implies a softness and the absence of a sharp edge to our personalities. The dictionary I consulted suggested that this word implies a deliberate or voluntary kindness or forbearance in dealing with others. One dictionary said the word gentleness involves having a kind nature. Of course, when Paul wrote the letter to the Philippians, he didn't write it in Latin, French, or English. He wrote in Greek, but the Greek term he used had exactly the same meaning as what I've said above. Paul used the word epieikḗs, which is usually translated gentle or reasonable. Various English translations have rendered this word: considerate, reasonable, gentle, gracious.

I looked up all the occurrences of this word in the Bible, and having studied those references and look at the dictionaries, I want to suggest my own definition. When the Bible talks about gentleness I believe it refers to the ability to stay calm in all your conflicts and kind in all your conduct. Now, that's a supernatural quality. That's a spiritual quality. That is Jesus living through us, because we're not like that on our own. This is a biblical quality, and it's vital to developing a Christian personality. And as I studied the occurrences of the word "gentle" in the Bible, I came away with four benefits to bear in mind.

Gentleness Reduces Anxiety

First, a gentle spirit reduces anxiety, which is Paul's point in Philippians 4. In this passage, the apostle gives us an eight-point plan for reducing anxiety and experiencing the peace of God that transcends understanding. His first recommendation is to adopt joy as your go-to attitude in life; and the second is to let your gentleness be evident to all. He said, in effect, learn to be gentle and don't create anxiety for yourself or for others. Some people keep everyone torn up. They're always involved in conflict. They raise the stress level wherever they go. People who are difficult create a lot of stress for themselves and for others. The Bible is full of examples of those whose lives were complicated by a stern or stubborn or high-handed demeanor. Let me give you three examples:

> • In 1 Samuel 25, there was a wealthy farmer named Nebal, who was described as being surly and mean in his dealings. He got into an altercation with David and his men, and he ending up having a stroke and dying.
>
> • In 1 Kings 12, King Rehoboam entertained a delegation of countrymen asking him to pull back on the load the government was making on its citizens. Rehoboam called in his older advisors and asked them about it. These seasoned statesmen told him to listen to the people and respond with gentleness and favor. Then he consulted the younger men he had grown up with, and they advised him to answer harshly. That's what the king did, and as a result he lost ten of the twelve tribes that made up his kingdom.
>
> • In the New Testament, Paul dealt with a lot of difficult people, and on one occasion he warned Titus about being drawn into conflicts with them. He said, "Avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless. Warn a divisive person once, and then warn them a second time. After that, have nothing to do with them. You may be sure that such people are warped and sinful; they are selfcondemned" (Titus 3:9-11).

The context, then, here in Philippians 4 would tell us that people who are difficult, who have sharp edges to their personalities, create anxiety for themselves and for others. So, said the apostle, to reduce anxiety, develop a gentle spirit. Let your gentleness be evident to all. Gentleness Reflects Christ The reason, of course, is that a gentle spirit reflects Christ. In Matthew 11, He described Himself as being "gentle and humble in heart" (Matthew 11:29). In Matthew 21:5, Jesus was described as being "gentle and riding on a donkey, and on a colt." This didn't keep Jesus from speaking plainly when He needed to. There were times He condemned the hypocrites and rebuked the demons. But there was never a time when He lost control of Himself or His words or His emotions. And the default setting on His personality was compassion, love, gentleness, and humility—a willingness to touch and help those with whom He came in contact.

I have a small ornamental pond along the front corner of my house, and a couple of months ago I purchased two small fish—koi. I paid six or seven dollars each for them, and they've grown very quickly. But they are so skittish we have trouble seeing them. From

a distance we'll see them swimming around in their little world, but as soon as we approach the pond, they panic. They dart back and forth as if we were going to kill and eat them, desperately looking for a rock or lily pad to hide behind. I've been reading articles on the Internet about how to tame your koi, but so far we've not established fellowship. I think we feel like that toward God sometimes. He comes up and towers over us and gazes down into our little pond, and we're afraid of Him. He is vast, unbounded, absolute in all His attributes and holy in all His ways. The fear of the Lord is, in one respect, a healthy attitude of reverence and awe. But the Lord is also a loving God, and because of His love He jumped in the pond with us, as it were. And when we see Jesus, we see the gentleness and the tenderness and the compassion of God. Sometimes when I feel particularly sinful or unworthy, I think of the verse that is spoken about Christ in both the Old and the New Testaments: "A bruised reed He will not break, and a smoldering wick He will not snuff out" (Isaiah 42:3 and Matthew 12:20). God loves you, and through Jesus Christ He reaches out to you with all the tenderness of His nail-scarred hands.

Now, when we respond to His love and receive Him as Lord and Savior, He moves into our hearts and begins to remodel our temperaments. He wants to permeate our personalities with nine different attitudes, which reflect the character of the Lord Jesus. These are called in Galatians 5:22, the "Fruit of the Spirit," and one of them is gentleness. The Bible says, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control." Here's another passage along the same lines—Ephesians 4:1-2: "As a prisoner of the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle…."

In other words, when we are completely humble and completely gentle, we are living a life worthy of the calling we have received, worthy of our calling in Christ. Husbands and wives need to remember this in their marriages, and those of us who are parents need to practice this with our children. Brothers and sisters need to remember this. Many if not most of our most anxious or stressful moments in life occur within our family relationship and sometimes under the same roof. We get angry. We argue. We speak harshly. We insult. We yell or scream. We lose our temper. We withdraw our love. None of that reflects the personality of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Colossians 3:12-15 says, "Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Bear with one another and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful."

Gentleness Gets Things Done

The third aspect of gentleness that I've found in the Bible is very pragmatic. The Bible says we should be gentle, because gentleness gets things done. It works. It not only reduces our anxiety and reflects our Lord, it simply gets things done. There are two unusual verses about this in the book of Proverbs. The first is Proverbs 25:15: "Through patience a ruler can be persuaded, and a gentle tongue can break a bone." What does that mean? One of the softest parts of our body is the tongue. It's made to be flexible so we can eat and speak. But the hardest parts of our body are our bones, which are rigid. But according to Solomon, a gentle tongue is stronger than a rigid bone. We could paraphrase this verse to say that a person who knows how to speak gently will be stronger in any situation that someone who is rigid and severe. One translation put it like this: "Gentle speech is very powerful."3 Another said, "Gentle speech breaks down rigid defenses."4

And the New Century Version said, "A gentle word can get through to the hard-headed."

I learned this lesson when I was in high school. I had a job at Jim Chambers Men's Shop on Elk Avenue of my hometown of Elizabethton, Tennessee. Jim was a wonderful man, a Christian, and he had been a retailer for many years with a loyal base of customers in our community. One day while I was working, a man—a farmer, a hillbilly—came in very angry. He was upset, as I recall, over a pair of shoes he had purchased. He just let Jim have it, telling him how sorry the shoes were, how they hurt his feet, how they didn't fit right, how they weren't made well, how he'd been cheated. There in front of Jim and me and whatever customers were in the store, he just let Jim have it with both barrels. It was very tense, and my heart just about stopped beating. Jim just stood there looking at the man, looking at the shoes, and nodding. When the man finished his tirade, I waited for Jim to let him have it. But Jim just said, "Mr. Farmer, I'm sorry you don't like your shoes. What would like me to do about it? Would you like your money back? Would you like another pair of shoes? I'll be glad to give you another pair at no charge. You just pick them out. I just want you to be pleased." It was as though the farmer just wilted. He said, "Well, I guess another pair of shoes would be all right." Jim looked at me and said, "Help this man find another pair of shoes." Well, my hands were shaking a little bit from the fracas, but I helped him find some more shoes and he left much more calmly than he had arrived. As soon as he was out the door, Jim smiled and winked at me and said, "I lost a pair of shoes but I kept a customer."

That leads to the other great verse about this in Proverbs, one of the most psychologically sound verses of Scripture—Proverbs 15:1: "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger." In the New Testament Epistles, we're told that leaders must master the art of the gentle answer. Leaders must know how to put Proverbs 25:15 and Pr 15:1 into practice. In the book of 1

Timothy, the apostle Paul gave a lot of good advice to his protégée, Timothy, who was trying to lead the work of the great church of Ephesus. He told him to appoint overseers who were, "… not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome" (1 Timothy 3:3). He said to him, "Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters" (1 Timothy 5:1-2). He went on to tell him to cultivate certain leadership traits in his personality, including "righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, and gentleness." A few pages later, Paul instructed another protégée, Titus, to be gentle toward everyone" and to teach all the church members to be the same. A few pages later, Peter told us to adopt the same strategy with those who don't know Christ. He said, "But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect" (1 Peter 3:15). We're more likely to be successful in life if we cultivate that quality, which means governing the rougher elements of our tempers and practicing self-control with our tongues.

Recently I've been reading a book by the famous basketball coach John Wooden, who was head coach for many years at UCLA. He was one of the most revered coaches in the nation. He credited much of his success to his father. He said, for example, that once when he was a boy he watched his father deal with a certain situation. Scattered around the farmland near the Wooden home in Indiana were gravel pits. The county would pay local farmers to take teams of mules or horses into the pits and haul out loads of gravel. Some pits were deeper than others, and sometimes it was hard for a team to pull a wagon filled with gravel out through the wet sand and steep incline. One steamy summer day, wrote Wooden, a young farmer was trying to get his team of horses to pull a fully loaded wagon out of the pit. He was whipping and cursing those beautiful plow horses, which were frothing at the mouth, stomping, and pulling back from him. "Dad watched for a while and then went over and said to the farmer, 'Let me take 'em for you….' "First Dad started talking to the horses, almost whispering to them, and stroking their noses with a soft touch. Then he walked between them, holding their bridles and bits while he continued talking—very calmly and gently—as they settled down. Gradually he stepped out in front of them and gave a little whistle to start them moving forward while he guided the reigns. Within moments, those two big plow horses pulled the wagon out of the gravel pit as easy as could be. As if they were happy to do it." John Wooden said, "I've never forgotten what I saw him do and how he did it. Over the years I've seen a lot of leaders act like that angry young farmer who lost control…. So much more can usually be accomplished by Dad's calm, confident, and steady approach."5 And then John Wooden said something in his book that sums up what I've been trying to say on these pages: "It takes strength inside to be gentle on the outside."6

Gentleness does not imply weakness. Just the opposite. It implies strength, maturity, self-control, and a desire to be productive in life. It requires a strong self-image. Insecure people get their dander up; they feel threatened; they feel slighted and offended and they compensate by over-reacting. But as we mature in Christ, we exchange our low image of ourselves with a high image of Christ. The Holy Spirit forms His personality within us, and unleashes the incredible power of a gentle spirit.

Gentleness Pleases the Lord

And that pleases the Lord. A gentle spirit reduces anxiety, reflects Christ, gets things done, and pleases the Lord. There's a wonderful verse about this in the Bible, and it's addressed to women. But what it says to women is transferable to all of us. The Bible says, "Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold jewelry or fine clothes. Rather, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight. For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to adorn themselves" (1 Peter 3:3-5). Developing a gentle spirit is God's beauty secret. It's the way we make ourselves attractive to others, to the world, and to the Lord. A gentle spirit, says the Bible, is of "great worth in God's sight." There isn't much gentleness in the world today. Just turn on the radio or television. Watch a movie. People are indignant. People are shouting at each other. People insult one another as our culture becomes increasing crude and coarse. It can seep into our homes and churches. I confess I'm not always as gentle as I should be in reacting to provocation or fatigue or stress. But as Christians we should be different. When we trust Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, we begin to change. And we keep improving as long as we're on earth. If you want to win over anxiety, you can't skip Philippians 4:5: Let your gentleness be evident to all.

Endnotes

1 "Married for 75 Years without a Single Fight" by Monica Cantilero, August 11, 2015, at www.christiantoday.com/article/married.for.75. years.without.a.single.fight.us.christian.couple.gets.medias.attention/61583.htm.

2 "Area Couple Celebrates 75 Years of Marriage" by Jessica Bringe at www.weau.com/home/headlines/Area-couple-celebrates-75-yearsof-marriage-320981951.html.

3 ERV (Easy to Read Version)

4 The Message

5 John Wooden, The Essential Wooden (NY: McGraw-Hill, 2007), 8-9.

6 John Wooden, The Essential Wooden (NY: McGraw-Hill, 2007), 11.

THE PRACTICE OF NEARNESS
Philippians 4:4-9
Robert Morgan

If you're a tennis fan you know that later this month, one of the great championships is set to begin. It's the U.S. Open, which takes place in late August and early September in Flushing Meadow in New York City. One of the major contenders this year is a tennis player named Mardy Fish, and a lot of people are rooting for him because he's had a difficult time battling anxiety. At the 2012 U.S. Open he walked away from a showdown with Roger Federer because of anxiety. His anxiety attack really began while he was playing a earlier match against another player. In the fourth set, he felt a wave of anxiety come over him and he said it felt like his heart was racing out of control. He rushed to the locker room and was hooked up to a heart monitor, but his heart was fine. It was his mind that had gotten out of rhythm. "My heart wasn't even beating that fast," he later said. "It was just me, my mind." The next day he was scheduled to play a dream match against Federer, but as he drove to the tournament he broke down in tears. Once there, he broke down again. He couldn't go through with it. He went to the airport and boarded a plane for California, but as the plane taxied toward the runway he had another panic attack, forcing the plane to return to the terminal. For the last three years, he has been working hard to overcome anxiety in his life, and in a couple of weeks he's returning to the U.S. Open for what he says is his final competition. After that he's planning to retire from profession tennis.1

A lot of times our minds get out of rhythm. We feel overwhelmed. We buckle under the stress of life. As we saw a couple of weeks ago, that even happened to the apostle Paul in the city of Troas when, according to his recollections in 2 Corinthians 2, he arrived there to preach the Gospel and found the doors wide open, but he couldn't complete his mission because of anxiety over his problems elsewhere. But Paul worked through these issues and several years later he gave us the Bible's greatest passage on overcoming worry and experiencing the peace of God that transcends human understanding. That's the passage we're studying in this series of sermons, and today we're coming to our third practice or point. If I had a chance to sit down with Mardy Fish, this is the Scripture I'd like to share with him. Since he's not here today, I'll just share it with you—Philippians 4:4-9:

> Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

Review "Put these things into practice," said Paul at the end of our passage. As I analyze this paragraph in the Bible, it seems to me the Lord gives us eight different attitudes and behaviors to put into practice. First is the practice of rejoicing. Verse 4 says: "Rejoice in the Lord always." When we receive Jesus Christ as Savior, He comes into our hearts with all His presence and promises and provisions. We may not be able to rejoice in our situations or circumstances, but He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. We can rejoice in Him. That means setting the go-to attitude of our hearts should be deliberate and spiritual joy. It's a commandment to obey, a choice to make, an attitude to cultivate, and an atmosphere to create around us. Second is the practice of gentleness. Verse 5 says: "Let your gentleness be evident to all." Whenever we're rude, harsh, difficult, reactive, and angry, it creates a lot of anxiety in our lives and in the lives of others. Anyone can be like that. Anyone can be rude or abrupt or angry. But it takes a person of real maturity and strength to be gentle. According to Galatians 5:22-23, gentleness is a fruit of the Spirit. Gentleness reduces anxiety, reflects Christ, gets things done, and pleases the Lord. Now today we're coming to the practice of nearness as we study the next little phrase, which is at the end of verse 5.

It's a simple statement of fact that, if we're not careful, we may pass over without seeing; but it is well worth noting: "The Lord is near." This is the practice of nearness. But as soon as we read these four little words we confront an exegetical problem interpreting it. What did Paul mean when he said, "The Lord is near. The Lord is at hand"? There are two possibilities, and when I consult the commentators on this verse they are evenly split. Did Paul mean that the Lord was near in terms of time or in terms of space? Did He mean that the Lord's coming is near or that His presence is near? Those are the two interpretations, and you can find a good defense for both of them in study Bibles and commentaries. Either statement would be absolutely true. I find it very difficult to make a determination about this because both interpretations reflect biblical truth. Let me give you an example of this from another New

Testament writer— James. I want to show you two verses side by side: James 4:8 and James 5:8, and you'll see what I mean.

- James 4:8: "Come near (draw near) to God and He will come (or draw) near to you."
- James 5:8: "You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near."

We can draw near to God in terms of our relationship with Him, and His coming is near in terms of His return. So when Paul said, "The Lord is near," what did He mean? Well, perhaps there is another possibility. Paul was a brilliant man. Surely he knew these words could be taken in two ways. Surely he knew his sentence was subject to two interpretations. Why didn't he clarify it? Perhaps he read that sentence after writing it and said to himself, "Well, that's a true statement however it's taken. I think I'll just let it remain as it is."

Now, as a general rule I preach and teach that every Bible passage has only one correct interpretation. In fact, that's a fundamental rule of Bible study. A sentence in the Bible can't mean just whatever we want it to mean. The correct interpretation is the one that corresponds to what was in the mind of the author when he wrote it. That typically means that a passage has only one correct interpretation. But what if Paul knew his words could be taken in two ways? What if his real point is that Christ is close at hand—both in terms of His presence and in terms of His coming. Well, I don't know. I suppose if Paul wanted to endow his sentence with a double meaning he could certainly do so. But, in any event, both interpretations represent Christian truth, so let's look at them both.

1. Enjoy the Prospect of His Coming

First, when Paul said, "The Lord is near," he could have been telling us to enjoy the prospect of His coming. The book of Revelation begins and ends by telling us that the Lord is near in terms of His coming. This is a constant biblical refrain. This is our constant hope and joy. Sometimes when I'm overwhelmed with worry or with the weight of problems, I just tell myself that in 100 years I'll not be worried about this at all. Fifty years from now I'll not be worried about this at all. The Lord takes His children out of the world and releases them from all their problems; or perhaps He will come today or tomorrow and deliver us from all our distresses. In any event, our future hope is a tremendous counterweight to our current pressures. One of the things we look forward to most in eternity is the freedom we'll have from every worry, every anxiety, and every care.

> Revelation 21:4 says, "He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

Right now we're part of the old order of things. We've living under the curse that fell across the universe because of sin. But for the Christian, all our problems are momentary. They are all temporary. Whatever you're worrying about now will be of no concern to you a hundred years from now. God is going to release you from all your troubles and work them all out for your good. The apostle Paul referred to this earlier in the book of Philippians when he wrote:

> "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body" (Philippians 1:21- 24).

In other words, Paul welcomed the prospects of leaving behind all his stresses and strains and pains. He was eager to leave his problems behind and be with the Lord. He said that would be better for him by far. But he felt God still had some fruitful labor for him on earth, so he was willing to stay and do it. Nevertheless, he was looking forward to the Lord's return, which he referred to again in Philippians 3:18, when he discussed his adversaries.

> "For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables Him to bring everything under His control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like His glorious body" (Philippians 3:18-21).

When I was a little boy, ten or eleven years old, my dad announced we were going to Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, for a vacation. I recalled going there before, and I can't tell you how excited I was. I loved going to Myrtle Beach, going out for pancakes in the morning, playing in the ocean all day, riding the waves, going to the amusement part in the evening, having my parents' full attention for the whole week. My little sister, Ann, was about five; and I wanted her to be as excited as I was, but I didn't have anything to show her. I recall finding a notepad and envelope and stamp and writing to the Myrtle Beach Chamber of Commerce to see if they would send me some brochures. Well, did they ever! I began getting brochures by the dozens from every attraction and amusement park and hotel and restaurant on the Grand Strand. I went over every brochure with my little sister and got her so excited she could hardly sleep at night. When the time finally came to leave we were wound up so tightly with anticipation I think we could almost have flown there by flapping our arms. Now, in the week before we left, I probably had a bicycle wreck. I probably scraped my knee. I might have gotten into trouble with my parents. But I'm sure I recovered from those scrapes more quickly because I was busy packing up for the beach. I still love going to Myrtle Beach. It's my favorite vacation spot in the world. It brings back all the memories

of my childhood vacations there.

But now I've got another destination I'm looking forward to, and I'm even more excited. And in times of anxiety or distress, I remind myself, "None of this is going to matter to me in a few years. All my problems are short-lived, and in any event God has promised they will somehow turn out for good. But in the meantime, as Paul said in 2 Corinthians 4:16-18:

> "We do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal."

The Lord is near, so enjoy the prospect of His coming.

2. Enjoy the Pleasure of His Company

But now, let's think of the other way of looking at this verse. When Paul said, "The Lord is near," he might have been thinking of the pleasure of God's company. In fact, this is my preferred interpretation. Jesus Christ came to earth and rose again to rip open the veil that separated us from God. He died to forgive the sins that kept us estranged from God. When we come to Christ, the primary result is that we're instantly brought into a close relationship with our Creator. When we're under attack in some way it's a great consolation to know we have the Lord beside us. We have constant access to His throne. We have His Spirit within and around us. That staves off worry. Notice how this passage unfolds in verses 5 and 6: "The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything." This is very similar to Psalm 46:

> "God is…an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear…."

This is something Paul had learned from experience. Let me show you a passage about it in the book of Acts. In chapter 23, the apostle had been seized in Jerusalem and his entire future was in jeopardy. His plans and his prospects were at risk. His freedom was threatened. He was in legal jeopardy. How would you feel under those circumstances? I've already said that Paul was a man filled with nervous energy and perhaps prone toward anxiety. In the middle of the crisis, Paul had to appear before the Jewish Sanhedrin and it almost caused a riot. Look at the passage, starting in Acts 23:9:

> "There was a great uproar, and some of the teachers of the law who were Pharisees stood up and argued vigorously. 'We find nothing wrong with this man,' they said. 'What if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?'

The dispute became so violent that the commander was afraid Paul would be torn to pieces by them. He ordered the troops to go down and take him away from them by force and bring him back to the barracks. Notice what happened next:

> The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, "Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome." Notice those words, "The Lord stood near Paul and said…."

That is exactly what God does today. It's true that God is omnipresent— always present everywhere. It's true that He fills heaven and earth. But in a personal way He draws near to us and speaks to us in times of stress, worry, anxiety, or fear. As I look back over my adult life, I've had a lot of times when I've been overtaken with anxiety. I've had times when I almost suffocated with worry. But what I remember most about those times is how they drove me to sit down, open my Bible, cry out to the Lord, pray to Him, and find specific Bible verses that calmed me down and gave me strength and courage. Those have become my favorite verses today. That's the privilege of every Christian. Let me show you another biblical example.

Turn to Psalm 73. According to the superscription at the beginning of the Psalm, this was written by a man named Asaph, who was a musician and worship leader. Yet his man was overwhelmed with discouragement. He was distressed by the actions of those around him. Look at the way he began, with verses 1-2:

> Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart. But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold….

He went on to describe his anguish and anxiety. Certain evil men were ruling the roost and they seemed to be prospering, and it was causing a lot of trouble. But in verses 21-28, Asaph said:

> When my heart was grieved and my spirit embittered, I was senseless and ignorant; I was a brute beast before You. Yet I am always with You.

In other words, when everything else goes wrong at least I am with You and You are with me. I have the Lord's presence to enjoy.

> You hold me by the right hand. You guide me with your counsel, and afterward You will take me into glory.

There we have the same twofold emphasis of Philippians 4:5. He is with us now, and soon we'll be with Him.

> Whom have I in heaven but You? And earth has nothing I desire besides You.

When stress engulfs me, I'm going to enjoy the prospect of Your coming and the pleasure of Your company.

> My flesh and my heart my fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. Those who are far from You will perish; You destroy all who are unfaithful to You.

Now look at this closing statement:

> But as for me, it is good to be near God. I have made the Sovereign Lord my refuge; I will tell of all Your deeds.

Some of the older translations say: "The nearness of my God is my Good." When He was overwhelmed, he reminded himself that his God was near him and that he was near to his Lord. The nearness of our God is our good! The "Near Verses" like this one in the Bible are so comforting:

> • Moses told the Israelites: "What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the Lord our God is near us whenever we pray to Him?—Deuteronomy 4:7
>
> • The Psalmist once said that he was surrounded by difficult people, but he added: "Yet You are near, Lord, and all Your commands are true. Long ago I learned from Your statutes that You established them to last forever" (Psalm 119:151- 152).
>
> • Psalm 145:18 says, "The Lord is near to all who call on Him, to all who call on Him in truth." • Jeremiah said, "You came near when I called You, and You said, 'Do not fear'" (Lamentations 3:57).
>
> • Ephesians 2:13 says, "But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ."
>
> • Hebrews 10:22 says, "Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience."
>
> • James said, "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you" (James 4:8, NKJV).
>
> • "The Lord is near," says Philippians 4:5. So when you are anxious, when your worried, when you are overwhelmed by the pressures of life, remember to train your mind to fix your thoughts on how near Jesus is to you.

His coming is near; but His company is near. He is there with you. When you awaken in the morning, He is there. When you shower and dress to stagger on to work or school, He is there. When you board the plane, He is there. When the phone rings, He is there. When you get a bad report, He is there. When you face a difficult person, He is there. As you press through the day, as you do you work, as you rest and enjoy your leisure, He is there. As you turn the doorknob and reenter your house at night, He is there. As you retire and go to bed, He is there.

To paraphrase Saint Patrick:

> Christ within you; Christ around you. Christ before you; Christ behind you. Christ above you; Christ below you, Christ on your left hand and Christ on your right, Christ when you sit down and Christ when you lie down. Christ in every place; Christ at every time.

Or as a hymnist of yesteryear put it:

> The Great Physician now is near,
> the sympathizing Jesus.
> He speaks the drooping heart to cheer,
> O hear the voice of Jesus.

So whatever your burdens today remember the practice of joy, the practice of gentleness, the practice of nearness:

> Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

Endnotes

> 1 www.wsj.com/articles/mardy-fishs-match-with-anxiety-143974796

THE PRACTICE OF PRAYER
Philippians 4:4-9
Robert Morgan

Talk about a sign from heaven! Not long ago a New Zealand pilot named Owen B. Wilson wanted to do something special for his friend, Grant Stubbs, who was having a birthday. Wilson offered to take his friend flying. Wilson was part of a flight club had access to a tiny twoseat, micro-light airplane. They took off after church on Sunday from the South Island town of Blenheim in the Marlborough region, flying northeast over the spectacular Golden Bay, around the hills and over the gorgeous landscapes and seascapes of the northern tip of the island. The weather was crystal clear. Below them were vineyards, beaches, and huge mountains descending into the ocean. But as they ascended over one particularly tall mountain, the engine sputtered and died. With no engine, the plane began to quickly lose altitude. The beaches were behind them, and Wilson could see nothing but steep mountainsides descending into a treacherous sea. Both men were Christians, and they did what any of us would do in that situation. They prayed—instantly and earnestly. Stubbs, who had grown up in a minister's home and had been very involved in Youth for Christ and Campus Life, prayed aloud as Wilson manhandled the controls. When it appeared the two would fly into a mountain, Stubbs cried: "Lord, please help us to get over that steep ledge!" They skimmed over the ridge, and Grant begin praying, "Lord, we need to find somewhere to land!" It seemed hopeless, but then in the distance the men saw a little flat strip of land. It was almost hidden between two ridges. Somehow Wilson managed to steer the plane in that direction. They gilded into the narrow valley and touched down, bouncing to a stop. They both shouted, "Thank You, Lord!" And then they looked up and just in front of them was a huge water pump tower bearing a large twenty-foot sign that said: "Jesus is Lord!" Come to find out, the field belonged to a Christian retreat center, which explains the giant billboard. The owners came out to greet the men and told them the field was usually full of livestock, but on this day all the animals were standing along the edge of the field, as though giving them room to land.1 That story exemplifies this message. Many times we encounter anxious moments in life. Our engines stall. We encounter turbulence. Maybe we're in a nosedive. Perhaps we're bracing for a crash. But that's the moment when we learn to pray, and that's how we discover the incredible truth that Jesus is Lord.

We're in a series of sermons entitled "Do Not Be Anxious," based on Philippians 4:4-9, and today we're coming to the heart of the passage, which tells us not to be anxious about anything, but to pray about everything. Let's begin by reading the text together:

> Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you. —Philippians 4:4-9

Notice those last words. The Bible gives us some instructions and tells us to put them into practice. As I dissect this paragraph, there are eight practices for us to adopt if we're going to worry less and live more, and during the previous Sundays we've looked at the first three of them: We began with the Practice of Joy, which is in verse 4:

> "Rejoice in the Lord always; I will say it again: Rejoice!"

The Bible tells us to "count it all joy," and the rejoicing life is a command to obey, a choice to make, an attitude to cultivate, and a climate to create around us. The second step is the Practice of Gentleness. Verse 5a says,

> "Let your gentleness be evident to all."

Gentleness means staying calm in conflicts and kind in conduct, and when we learn to do that it reduces anxiety, reflects Christ, gets things done, and pleases God. The third is the Practice of Nearness. Verse 5b says: "The Lord is near." This may refer to the Lord's future coming or to His immediate presence. Either possibility is a living reality for the Christian. The Lord's coming is near and His presence is dear. The Lord is at hand. That brings us to the heart of the passage, to verse 6, and to the fourth practice—the Practice of Prayer:

> Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

Let's Examine This Verse Let's begin by examining this verse and looking at the words.

The first key term is anxious: Do not be anxious. The apostle Paul originally wrote this in the Greek language, and the word he used

was “merimnao,” which comes from a stem word meaning “to pull in different directions.” The idea is having your mind pulled apart, cleaved apart, yanked away with distracting care. You are anxious when something draws your mind away into anxious thoughts and preoccupation with worry. What could do that? The answer is nothing. Nothing should do that for the child of God. Be anxious about nothing. Now, if this advice were given only here in the Bible, it would still be welcome and needed by our heart. But it is not given only here. This particular Greek word appears in seven different passages in the Bible. And, of course, I can’t resist giving them to you because I want you to see the repetitive and recurrent way the Lord wants us to view His thinking about this.

- It’s found in the Greek Version of the Old Testament (the Septuagint) in Psalm 55:22: “Cast your anxiety upon the Lord and He will sustain you. He will never allow the righteous to be moved.” In other words “Cast on God everything that causes you to worry.”
- Jesus used this word over and over in His great passage about worry in Matthew 6:25-34: “Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life. Do not worry about what you will eat or drink or wear… Why do you worry? Do not worry, but seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.”
- Later in Matthew 10:19, Jesus said about those persecuted for His name’s sake: “But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say.”
- In Luke 10:41, he used this word when He gently upbraided Martha, saying, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things.”
- In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul told the Christians to whom he was writing: “I would like you to be free from concern, from worry, from anxiety.”
- The apostle Peter used this word when he said in 1 Peter 5:7, “Cast all your anxieties, your concerns, on God, for He cares for you.”
- And here in Philippians 4:6, it’s the most explicit of all: “Do not be anxious about anything.”

According to the commentaries I consulted, the construction of this sentence in the original language as Paul wrote it contains the emphasis that the Philippians had been anxious, they had been worried, and they were to stop.2 This could literally be translated, “Stop being worried. Stop living a life of worry. You’ve been anxious over many things, but do not live that way from now on. Stop this life of worrying.”

How is this possible? Fretting comes to us as naturally as breathing. Some of our earliest memories are the anxieties that we encountered in childhood, and we seem to never outgrow our capacity to worry. I should know, because I’m an expert on the subject. But the Bible believes in replacement therapy. It tells us to replace worry with prayer. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation… That phrase, “in every situation,” is indicative of the book of Philippians. Paul was writing from jail, and he had been in just about any and every situation a person can confront. All the way through the book, there’s a hint of this.

- In Philippians 1:12, he talked about what had happened to him. He said, “I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me….”
- In verse 19, he again talked about “what has happened to me.”
- In verse 27, he told them, “Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the Gospel.”
- In Philippians 2:23, he said he would send Timothy to them, “…as soon as I see how things go.”
- Here in Philippians 4:6, he used the phrase, “…in every situation.”
- Down in verse 11, he said, “…whatever the circumstances.”
- In verse 12, he used the expression, “…in any and every situation.”

All these phrases indicate things that are outside of Paul’s control, things that he could not anticipate or resolve. But rather than worrying about them, he had learned he could bring them to the Lord and pray about them. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. Here Paul describes prayer in three ways. He uses the words “prayer” and “petition” and the phrase “present your requests.”

Prayer is a general word for our communication with God. It includes all kinds of prayers. Petition is a more specific term. It refers to the aspect of making specific requests to God. It’s one thing if I tell you I’m going to chat with a friend. It’s another if I tell you I’m going to ask him for a favor. I’m going to present him my request. This is an all-encompassing verse. It covers every base; it works every day. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. Let’s Practice This Verse I think I’m safe in saying that none of us do this perfectly, but we can improve, we can learn, we can do better about putting this verse into practice. First, we must practice everyday prayer. We must pray regularly. We need a foundation of daily prayer in our lives. Prayer is a very individual habit, and there isn’t a one-size-fits-all pattern to prayer. But thousands of Christians have derived great benefit from keeping a little notebook, either with pen and paper or electronically, in which they organize their prayer routines. Let’s just make up an example. Let’s suppose you had a friend named Drummond who unexpectedly died, and in his will he left you his prayer journal. Opening up the little notebook, what would you see? You might see:

- A list of his Bible reading. Drummond knew that prayer is a conversation, and conversations represent two-

way communication. Before talking to God in prayer, he read a passage of Scripture so God could speak to him. There on the opening page was a list of dates and the Bible references he was coming to.

• Next would be a thanksgiving page. After reading his Bible a few minutes, Drummond jotted down something for which He could praise or thank the Lord. He kept a praise and thanksgiving list.

• Third would be some Scripture prayers for himself. For example, Drummond sometimes struggled with anxiety, so he had claimed Philippians 4:6 for himself, and on this page he had written the words: "Philippians 4:6 - Lord, help me not to worry about anything today but to pray about everything." That had become a daily prayer. • Next is a running list of his personal prayer requests. Some of the items had a check mark beside them, indicating that God had answered them.

• Turning the page, you saw the names of his family members and loved ones.

• Then you noticed the next seven pages had the days of the week at the top of them: Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and so forth.

Drummond had so many friends, missionaries, church ministries, and prayer requests that he could not possibly pray for each one every day, so he had a large number of items for which he prayed weekly. Now, you and I don't have to do things exactly like Drummond did them. I have a friend who keeps a perpetual prayer list on a sheet of paper, carefully folded, and in his pocket. It's always there, which allows him to pray whenever and wherever he is. He can't keep up with a notebook or journal, but he's never without his prayer list. Some people keep a prayer list on the flyleaf of their Bibles. And others simply keep a mental prayer list. I sometimes wonder how the apostle Paul kept track of his prayers, because he so often mentioned to people how diligently he prayed for them. There's not a certain method that must be followed, but there does need to be a daily discipline in our lives, which helps us keep a foundation of daily prayer in our lives. Second, there comes a time when we need to practice D-Day prayer.

When we're faithful in regular, everyday prayer, we'll be able to shift more quickly into crisis time prayer during anxious days. That seems to be what Paul has in mind in this passage. The Living Bible puts it, "Don't worry about anything; instead pray about everything." When I read through the Bible, one of the most recurring patterns is how people took terrible problems to the Lord during specific times of prayer, and often the very words they used were recorded verbatim. In the book of 1 Samuel, a woman named Hannah had terrible problems in her home, and those problems drove her to prayer. She went to the tabernacle at Shiloh, and "In her deep anguish Hannah prayed to the Lord, weeping bitterly." The Bible says, "As she kept praying to the Lord, Eli (the high priest) observed her mouth. Hannah was praying in her heart, and her lips were moving but her voice was not heard. Eli thought she was drunk." He rebuked her, but she told him she had not been drinking, but "I was pouring out my soul to the Lord" (1 Samuel 1:10-15). And the Bible says that, having given her burden to the Lord, "she went her way and ate something, and her face was no longer downcast" (verses 18). God had not yet answered her prayer, but she had turned her worry list into a prayer list and cast her burden on the Lord.

In the book of 2 Chronicles, chapter 20, King Jehoshaphat and the nation of Judah faced a terrible military threat, one they could not possible withstand. The destiny of the nation hung by a spider's thread. But Jehoshaphat offered a very deep and detailed prayer about it, which is recorded word-for-word in this chapter. He said, "Lord… we have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on You" (2 Chronicles 20:12). That night, the king ended the day in a worshipful mood, and the next day he sent the choir ahead of the soldiers, singing praises to God in the face of the enemy. And God secured the victory for them. In Acts 4, the apostles were imprisoned, threatened, and released with an injunction they no longer preach the Gospel. But the gathered church had a special time of prayer and the place where they were meeting was shaken, and they were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the Word of God with boldness (Acts 3:23-31). It's difficult to find a biblical character who did not face a terrible crisis which drove him or her to prayer; and often their prayers are recorded for us word-for-word, along with a record of how God answered them. In times of great crisis, we must learn to turn our worry lists into prayer lists; and take our burdens to the Lord and leave them there. The old African-American hymnist, Charles A. Tindley, was counseling one day with a man who was a chronic worrier. After listening to him awhile, Tindley advised him to take his burdens to the Lord and leave them there. He later wrote a song on that theme, which I sang growing up. If the world from you withhold of its silver and its gold, And you have to get along on meager fare, Just remember, in His Word, how He feeds the little bird; Take your burden to the Lord and leave it there.3 You know, even an entire nation can do this.

Charles Wilson, who was the president of General Electric, once recalled being in Union Station in Washington, D.C., on the morning of June 6, 1944. Thousands of people were coming and going, crisscrossing the great hall, headed to their respective trains. For weeks, there had been rumors of D-Day, a moment when Allied Forces would invade Western Europe to begin turning the tide of World War II. On this morning, something incredible happened. No announcement was made from the loudspeakers, and there were no radios or newsboys shouting the message. But suddenly everyone just stopped. Conversations ceased. The news passed from person to person that the invasion had begun. American boys were storming the beaches in Normandy. Wilson later described the beam of sunlight that pierced room like a cathedral. A woman dropped to her knees and folded her hands; near her a

man knelt down. “Then another, then another, until all around me people knelt in prayer before the hard wooden benches of Union Station.” A hush filled that cavernous station as multitudes spontaneously fell to their knees in prayer. Then slowly the woman rose to her feet. The man beside her rose, too, and within seconds Union Station was alive with motion and sound again. “But for those of us who witnessed the hush,” wrote Charles Wilson, “Union Station will always have a special meaning: we were there on the day the railroad station in Washington, D.C. became a house of worship.”4

But that’s not all. That night, President Franklin Roosevelt went on the radio to address the nation, and he gave what I consider the most moving speech in American history. Earlier this year, I visited the Roosevelt home and library in Hyde Park, New York, and I saw the original copy of this speech on display. It was typed out, but Roosevelt had been editing it with a pen until the moment of the broadcast. I don’t have time to read the entire thing, but it was a prayer. The whole speech was in the form of a prayer. Although I’ve read it many times and heard the recording of it over and over, I still get choked up when I read or hear it.

> My Fellow Americans, Last night, when I spoke with you about the fall of Rome, I knew at that moment that troops of the United States and our Allies were crossing the Channel in another and greater operation. It has come to pass with success thus far. And so, in this poignant hour, I ask you to join with me in prayer: Almighty God: Our sons, pride of our nation, this day have set upon a mighty endeavor, a struggle to preserve our Republic, our religion, and our civilization, and to set free a suffering humanity. Lead them straight and true; give strength to their arms, stoutness to their hearts, steadfastness in their faith. They will need Thy blessings….

After praying for the men in the Armed Forces, he went on:

> And for us at home—fathers, mothers, children, wives, sisters, and brothers of brave men overseas, whose thoughts and prayers are ever with them— help us, Almighty God, to rededicate ourselves in renewed faith in Thee in this hour of great sacrifice. And he ended with the words of our Lord Jesus: Thy will be done, Almighty God. Amen.

Would that we had a president, a statesman, a leader in our nation who would have the courage and conviction in these days to lead us in prayer; but such leaders have left the stage, and it remains uncertain if any more will arise. But we can arise. From time to time, each of us faces our own individual D-Day. We have burdens that arise against us, an enemy who comes against us, storm winds that blow against us. But we’ll never have a burden that we cannot take to the Lord and leave it there. We can always come boldly to the throne of grace, and find grace to help in time of need (see Hebrews 4:16). So I want to challenge you to do two things.

First, establish a disciplined, daily time of ongoing prayer. Build the spiritual substructure of everyday prayer. Make room for prayer. Make time for prayer. Make time to meet with the Lord day by day and night by night.

Second, when you’re faced with a problem that tears at your mind and pulls your heart in two, take your burden to the Lord and leave it there. Learn the power of God’s replacement therapy. Turn your worry list into a prayer list and cast your burden on the Lord.

> Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Endnotes

1 Adapted from numerous newspaper articles, including “Fliers’ Prayers Answered” at www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_ id=1&objectid=10511547; and “Pilot of Doomed Aircraft Claims That His Passenger’s Prayers Helped the Pair Land Safely,” at www.dailymail. co.uk/news/article-1020917/Pilot-doomed-aircraft-claims-passengersprayers-helped-pair-land-safely.html; and other similar articles. This story was also related in Divine Intervention, by Daniel Fazzina (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2014), chapter 45: “We Need a Place to Land” by Grant Stubbs (with Owen Wilson).

2 See the New International Greek Testament Commentary, for example. 3 From the hymn, “Leave It There” by Charles A. Tindley, published in 1916. 4 A Very Present Help complied by the editors of Guidepost Magazine (Carmel, NY: Guideposts, 1985), 83.

THE PRACTICE OF MENTORING

Philippians 4:4-9

Robert Morgan

A couple of weeks ago, Reese Kauffman was with us for our Global Outreach Sunday, and I had to be careful in introducing him because Reese is one of my dearest friends and I could have taken the whole time talking about him. He's very unusual. For example, one of his hobbies is tracking down old mining trails in the highest elevations of the Rocky Mountains. A couple of years ago, I visited Reese and Linda in their home in Telluride, Colorado, and one afternoon Reese asked if I wanted to go with him on his all terrain vehicles, up into the Rockies. So I said I would, but just as we got ready to go a terrific thunderstorm blew in. I stood in the garage door while Reese was out in the weather, strapping the ATVs onto the trailer, and I saw a bolt of lightning strike a tree across the valley. It sent up a plume of smoke. I said, "Reese, are you sure we should go out in this weather." He said, "Don't worry about it." So off we went, to a very high trailhead, and then we got on the all terrain contraptions and went on old trails, along narrow switchbacks, alongside deep drop-offs until we were 12,000 and 13,000 feet in elevation. And when we got up there we drove right into an electrical storm. Reese stopped and got out the ponchos and handed them to me. Now, the man is fearless, but I'm not. So I said, "Reese, are we safe on these contraptions?" He said, "Don't worry about it." Well, there was lightning and thunder all around us, and rain and hail was falling. The sky was rumbling like a bowling alley. I said, "Reese, I know that if one is in a car during a thunderstorm, the tires serve as insulation. But what about on something like this? There's no roof. Do you think we're safe? He said, "Don't worry about it." He might have said something about the Lord protecting us, but he was drowned out by a thunderclap. Well, I looked around for an overhanging rock or a crevice in a cliff, but there was no shelter. So I told Reese I didn't think we were very safe in the storm. He turned to me and his blue eyes turned to a rather cold shade, and he said slowly and deliberately like a parent to a child: "Don't worry about it!" So I decided not to worry about it, and the storm passed and we were fine. In fact, the storm swept away the clouds and the views were fabulous. Later I told that story at an event where Reese was present, and afterward I received a package in the mail. It was a polo shirt, embossed with the word: "Don't worry about it." The Lord wants to replicate that experience for all of us.

Today and next Sunday we're concluding our series of messages entitled "Do Not Be Anxious," which is an extended exposition of Philippians 4:4-9, the Bible's premier text on the subject of worrying less and living more. Let's read this passage in its entirety, and then we'll focus today on verse 9.

> Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you. —Philippians 4:4-9

Introduction: The Role of Mentors When Saint Paul told us to put these things into practice, he was telling us there are certain practices we should adopt if we want to worry less and live more. We've broken down those practices one by one over the past several weeks, as we've looked at:

- The practice of rejoicing
- The practice of gentleness
- The practice of nearness
- The practice of prayer
- The practice of thanksgiving
- The practice of meditation

And today we're coming to the practice of mentoring. In verse 9, the apostle Paul told them: "Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice." The apostle Paul was simply repeated something he had said earlier in this epistle, in Philippians 3:17:

> Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just has you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do.

Earlier he had told the Corinthians the same thing in 1 Corinthians 11:1:

> Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.

That almost sounds a little audacious, but we have to remember something. The Christians in Corinth and Philippi didn't have the New Testament as we do. Their pastors, elders, and deacons didn't have the New Testament as we do. Furthermore, the Gentile (or nonJewish) converts didn't even have the Old Testament. They had little or no Scripture. They had little tangible teaching about

what to do after committing their lives to Jesus Christ. What does a Christian look like? What does a Christian do? How does a Christian act? How is a Christfollower different from everyone else? The handbook for that was still under construction. It hadn't been written yet. Perhaps some of the earliest New Testament writings were beginning to circulate, but they weren't widespread or readily available. There certainly was no complete New Testament. So there were new converts coming to Christ in waves across the Roman Empire, but there were no universally accessible teachings to show them how Christians looked and lived.

So Paul and the apostles became the models. They personally embodied and personified the Christian lifestyle, and they said, "If you want to live out your Christian life, then watch us. Live like we live. Do what we do. Talk like we talk. Act like we act. Adopt the disciplines you see in us. Display the attitudes you see in us. Incorporate the standards and convictions we exhibit. Follow our example as we follow Christ. Use us for a model. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you."

We have the complete Bible now—we have both Old and New Testaments. We have the Gospel accounts and the letters and epistles of the New Testament; but we still need models and mentors to help us see how a true Christian lives. One of my hobbies through the years has been collecting and reading Christian biographies and autobiographies. One thing I've noticed is that every effective Christian has found someone who taught, discipled, mentored, and encouraged them. In some ways, the history of Christianity has simply been the story of disciples mentoring disciples, from generation to generation, from one century to the next, in an endless chain of transformation.

When he was a young man, the great reformer Martin Luther had a mentor named Johann von Staupitz, who was the leader of the Augustinian community in Munich. When Luther was a depressed and conflicted young monk, it was von Staupitz that taught him to look to Christ and to wait patiently on God's grace through prayer rather than striving endlessly for self-developed peace of mind. He's the one who prompted Luther to study the book of Romans and rediscover the biblical doctrine of justification.

Or consider the story of the great Christian William Wilberforce, who fought human slavery throughout his life. Wilberforce lost his father at age eight, and he went to live with his uncle and aunt, who were friends of John Newton, the author of the hymn "Amazing Grace." Newton had been the captain of a slave ship before his conversion to Christ, and now he was a pastor and a great opponent of slavery. So as a boy, Wilberforce heard Newton's sermons, and, in fact, John Newton became a sort of hero to young William Wilberforce. But then Wilberforce moved away and as a teenager and young adult he didn't have a strong Christian presence in his life. Indeed, he himself was not a Christian. But he was very bright, and he went into politics. Wilberforce was dramatically and wonderfully converted to Christ while he was a member of Parliament, and he wasn't sure he should stay in politics. He felt that the political life wasn't compatible to Christian beliefs. But he sought out his old pastor, John Newton, who encouraged him to remain in Parliament and to advance the cause of Christ in the political arena. Newton encouraged him to fight for the abolition of slavery. In the years that followed, Wilberforce was hated by many people because of his campaign to end slavery. He was vilified, and on certain occasions he became very discouraged. At such times, he would often confide in person or by letter with his old mentor, John Newton. On July 21, 1796, for example, Wilberforce wrote a letter to Newton telling him he was thinking of retiring from public life. But Newton wrote back, and I want to read you what he said:

> You meet with many things which weary and disgust you… but then they are inseparably connected with your path of duty; and though you cannot do all the good you wish for, some good is done… It costs you something… and exposes you to many impertinences from which you would gladly be exempted; but if, upon the whole, you are thereby instrumental in promoting the cause of God and the public good, you will have no reason [for] regret. Nor is it possible at present to calculate all the advantages that may result from your having a seat in the House at such a time as this. The example, and even the presence of a consistent character, may have a powerful, though unobserved, effect upon others. You are not only a representative for Yorkshire, you have the far greater honour of being a representative for the Lord, in a place where many know Him not….

Newton ended his letter by encouraging Wilberforce to stay in politics but, even more, to stay closer than ever to the Lord. Newton said:

> He is always near. He knows our wants, our dangers, our feelings, and our fears. By looking to him we are enlightened and made strong out of weakness. With His wisdom for our guide, His power for our protection, His fullness for our supply, and proposing His glory as our chief end, and placing our happiness in His favor, in communion with Him and communications from Him, we shall be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all to stand. May the Lord bless you, my dear sir. May He be your sun and shield, and fill you with all joy and peace in believing.

I'm using Newton and Wilberforce as an example, but it's impossible to read the biography of any Christian leader in any stage of history without finding a chain reaction of influences that have shaped that man or woman for the Lord. I don't want to make this sermon about me, or I'd tell you about some of the mentors and models who had a tremendous influence on me. But all of us who

are living for the Lord today can say that. The Lord uses two things in our lives:

- First, there is the Bible. That's where we read and learn and understand who the Lord is and how He wants us to live.
- Second, there are those people who bring the Bible to life to us.

We look at them, and we see how biblical principles are lived out. They become models for us of the kind of discipleship the Bible describes. In the case of Paul in Philippians 4:9, the apostle wielded this influence in four ways. Did you notice that? Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice.

1. What You Have Learned We Are Mentored By Life-Changing People

First, he said, "What you have learned from me." That refers to his personal one-on-one mentoring. Paul himself was mentored and discipled by Barnabas. According to Acts 11, when the church in Antioch took off, Barnabas became, in effect, its pastor; and as the work grew he took a trip to Tarsus to look for the young man Saul; and, finding him, he brought him back to Antioch and worked with him as he developed skills as a church leader. Of course, Paul later devoted large amounts of time to one-on-one disciple-making. Take Timothy, for example. According to Acts 16, Paul started out on his second missionary journey and he came to the town of Lystra where he met Timothy, who was presumably a teenager. Paul said, "Pack your bags and come with me." And Paul spent the entire missionary tour pouring himself into the young man. Years later, in writing to the Philippians in chapter 2, he said in verse 19:

> I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. For I have no one else like him, who will show genuine concern for your welfare. For everyone looks out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the Gospel. I hope, therefore, to send him as soon as I see how things go with me.

This seems to be necessary for us. I don't know if it's even possible to develop maturity in our Christian lives if we don't have someone—a dad or mom or teacher or church worker or leader—who will exemplify the Christian life for us and help us develop the core habits of our Christian walk. We should all be looking for someone whose life we can influence toward greater maturity.

2. What You Have Received We Are Mentored By Life-Changing Words

Second, Paul said what you have received from me. This is referring to his notes, letters, and written teachings—his epistles. Even though he wasn't able to be in the city of Philippi often, Paul knew he could teach and model Christ for the Philippians through his writings. The entire letter of Philippians was an exercise in mentoring. And by the way, when we read the book of Philippians, Paul is still mentoring. He is mentoring us. This is mentoring through reading. So many people in my generation were mentored and discipled by reading J. I. Packer's classic book, Knowing God. I still keep a copy on the shelf by my desk. Actually it's Katrina's copy, which is all marked up. I don't know what happened to my original copy, but it's been a while since I've read it, and I'm thinking of ordering a new copy so I can mark it up fresh. In his opening chapter, Packer says that people who truly know God have great energy for God; they think great thoughts of God; they have great boldness for God; and they have great contentment in God. I've never been able to have a conversation with J. I. Packer; I've never met him, but he has mentored me in this book. I never met Charles Spurgeon; he died exactly sixty years before I was born. But his book, Lectures to My Students, helped shape my view of ministry and of preaching. I've never met the Chattanooga psychologist, Ross Campbell, but his book, How to Love Your Child, helped me to be a better parent when I was a new dad. Through the books you read, the sages of the ages can become your mentors. Think of it this way. What if you could invite Paul of Tarsus to have a cup of coffee with you? What if you could have tea with C. S. Lewis? What if Billy and Ruth Graham had an hour to spend with you? D. L. Moody? Fanny Crosby? Whenever you sit down in the porch swing or at Starbucks with their writings, it's like a personal mentoring session with the greatest Christians of the ages. That's the power of reading—what we have received.

3. What You Have Heard We Are Mentored By Life-Changing Sermons

Third, we are mentored by what we have heard. This refers to those times when they sat in church and listened as Paul taught them. This is referring to life-changing spoken words—sermons and lessons. There is a power in the preached and taught Word of God that cannot be explained by human means. When I was a freshman in college, very immature and discontent, very lukewarm in my Christian faith, very lost in terms of direction in life, I happened to turn on the radio and some station had what they called their Bible Conference Hour. I was at my Aunt Louise's house and I was alone. She had a huge radio and television console, and I happened to tune it to that station. Every night they broadcast a sermon recorded at a Bible Conference somewhere. And that evening, the speaker was a British speaker—I didn't even get his name that night—but he was preaching about the donkey on which Jesus rode into Jerusalem. That donkey was made for a purpose and it happened to be at the right time and in the right place in God's providence. And Jesus needed him. And he had to let Jesus ride him into Jerusalem, and he wasn't the center of attention; Jesus was. The donkey had to be submissive, to say, "Lord, I'll let you have the reins." But the speaker said, "If God can do

something with that donkey, He can do something with you." It was as though that speaker—I later learned he was Stuart Briscoe—had jumped through the radio speakers and was talking personally to me. That was the beginning of the process that later led me to yield my life to the Lord in full surrender.

4. What You Have Seen We Are Mentored By Life-Changing Examples

Finally, Paul said what you have seen in me. There were some people in those days who never had a chance to talk with the apostle Paul. Perhaps they were illiterate and couldn't read his letters. Perhaps they didn't have a chance to hear him speak, teach, or preach. But they watched him from a distance. He was able to mentor them without ever speaking a word. They saw the expression on his face. They saw the disciplines in his life. They saw the hope in his eyes. Conclusion And that brings us back full circle to our passage and to our topic. The real subject isn't mentoring or modeling, but dealing with issues of anxiety and personal peace. In the book of Philippians, Paul was imprisoned and the Philippians were anxious about him and anxious about the status of Christianity in the Roman world. There was opposition. There was persecution. Their hero had been incarcerated. But throughout this book, Paul is calm. He is cheerful. He is optimistic. He is content. He is upbeat and excited. And he was saying to them: Be like me! Rejoice in the Lord always, like I'm doing. Let your gentleness be evident to all, as I'm trying to do. Remember the Lord is near to you just as he is near to me. Learn to do what I'm doing—don't be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. Do what I'm doing, and learn to meditate and think about whatever is true, noble, right, pure, lovely admirable. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me or seen in me—put into practice.

So here's the bottom line. When people are frightened and anxious, when they are upset and worried, can they look at you and learn to be reassured in faith? Does your maturity build them up, or does your immaturity tear them down? I can tell you that many times since my day in the Rockies, when I'm tempted to worry and fret, I can hear the voice of Reese Kauffman ringing in my ears: "Don't worry about it." He became a model for me, and I drew peace from his confidence and faith. I learned a lesson from him about faith and fear. Let's learn to model the peace of God for others, as we obey Philippians 4:4-9:

> Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

PHILIPPIANS 4:4-9
Robert Morgan

> Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.
>
> Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

There was an article in the news the other day, and the headline caught my eye. It said that we are living in the United States of Anxiety. According to this article:

- Anxiety is now an epidemic in the United States.
- More Americans suffer from anxiety (in proportion to national population) than any other country in the world.
- Anxiety disorders affect 40 million Americans.
- Three of the top ten bestselling drugs sold in America are for mental illness.
- $42 billion a year is spent on anxiety-related disorders.

And I believe it. I've confessed many times that I have an anxiety gene that sends me into periodic spasms of worry. And I'm not

the only one. I read a story in the sports section of the newspaper last week about a baseball player with the St. Louis Cardinals who was put on the Disabled List. He was suffering, not from a physical injury, but from anxiety problems. A lot of us occasionally end up on life's Disabled List because of the crippling effects of anxiety.

Well, the Bible is like a medicine chest of anti-depressant verses and tranquilizing passages. Think of the Bible as being full of Therapeutic Theology. The best antidote in the world to mental illness in all its various form is the truth of God's Word.

Earlier in our 100 verse project, we studied what Jesus had to say on the subject of anxiety in Matthew 6: "Do not worry… Do not worry… Do not worry…," He said. Now today I want us to look at the definitive passage on this subject in the writings of the apostle Paul, and it's found here in Philippians 4. This is one of my favorite chapters in the Bible; and I love to preach from this paragraph because it is so outline-able. We can accurately call this: "God's Six-Step Program to Overcoming Worry in Your Life." This passage tells us what to do: Bam, bam, bam, bam, bam. It gives us an enumerated list, and so I'd just like to go over it as it's written.

1. Rejoice in the Lord (Php 4:4)

The first antidote for worry is here in verse 4: Rejoice in the Lord always; I will say it again: Rejoice. One commentary rendered this verse as saying: Be completely happy in the Lord. Let me repeat that: Be completely happy in the Lord.

Perhaps you're thinking: "You can't just tell someone to be happy. You can't just command joy."

Why not? Why can't we choose our own attitudes? I read somewhere that when you make yourself smile, the very act of smiling lifts your spirits and makes it easier for you to pull out of discouragement.

But notice that this is a qualified statement. This isn't like the song that says: "Don't worry! Be happy!" It doesn't just say "Rejoice." It tells us to rejoice in the Lord.

Now, we can say that joy and rejoicing are the subthemes of this book of Philippians. Paul wrote this letter from prison. He had lost his liberty. He had lost his freedom to travel. He was carrying a lot of burdens, cares, and concerns. And yet we can read through this book with a highlighter or a red pencil and mark time after time after time when he inserts the words joy and rejoicinginto the text of Philippians. And his joy and rejoicing were based on his relationship with the Lord Jesus, which nothing could take from him.

That's why he said, "Rejoice in the Lord!"

We may not be able to rejoice in our load, but we can rejoice in our Lord. You may have no joy in your situation, but you can rejoice in your Savior. You may be encased in shadows, but you can still walk in the light as He is in the light. To rejoice in the Lord means that we rejoice in our unassailable, unchanging relationship with the Sovereign Lord and in his qualities, gifts, promises, and attributes.

Deuteronomy 26:11 says we should rejoice in all the Lord's good gifts. 2 Chronicles 6:41 says we should rejoice in God's goodness. Psalm 9:14 says we should rejoice in His salvation. Psalm 31:7 says we should rejoice in His love. Psalm 89:16 says that we can rejoice in His name all day long. Psalm 119:14 tells us to rejoice in following His statutes as one rejoices in great riches. Psalm 119:162 tells us to rejoice in God's promises. Isaiah 65:18 tells us to rejoice forever in what God has created. Jeremiah 31:12 tells us to rejoice in the bounty of the Lord. And Romans 5:2 tells us to rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

And so Paul tells us that the first step to overcoming the stranglehold of worry in our lives is to make up our mind to rejoice in the Lord always.

2. Be Gentle (Php 4:5a)

As a second step in overcoming anxiety, Paul recommends a gentle demeanor. This is the third time in about a month that we've come across this concept in our memory verses. We learned that Proverbs 15:1 tells us that a soft answer turns away wrath. We learned in Galatians 5:22 that the fruit of the Spirit is gentleness. And now in Philippians 4, we're commanded to be gentle.

He was writing these words to the church in the city of Philippi. The Philippian church was one of the strongest and dearest in the New Testament. They were very generous, and they sent financial aid to the Apostle Paul time and again. But there was some internal strife within the church. Paul alludes to it several times in this letter, and in the passage immediately before the one we'restudying, he brings it out in the open: "I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you, loyal yokefellow, help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement

and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life."

In putting all this together, here's what we have. One of the major reasons for stress, worry, and anxiety in our lives is conflict and tension with other people. Most of the things we worry about involve interpersonal relationships in one way or another. Perhaps you're not getting along with your boss. Perhaps you're out of sorts with your co-workers or with your teachers in school. Maybe there is tension in your home.

Well, we may not be able to put out all the fires, but we can usually lower the temperature by being gentle with one another. Being gentle doesn't mean being weak or fragile. It just means that we are moderate in our reactions and we temper our responses.

3. Remember God's Nearness (Php 4:5b)

The third step in overcoming worry is to remember the nearness of our Lord. Verse 5b says: "The Lord is near." Now there are two possible ways to interpret this. It could refer to either time or space. Paul may have meant that the Lord's coming is near in terms of time. This could be a reference to the Second Coming. Or he might have meant that the Lord's presence is near us all the time. Both are true, but it seems to me that the second is preferable. We don't need to worry, for our Lord is with us, near us, all around us.

Sir William Dobbie was a British hero of both World Wars who was known as "Old Dob Dob" by his men. He'd been born to British parents living in Madras, India, and sent to England as a boy for schooling. Dobbie excelled in military engineering and first saw action in the Boer War of 1901 and 1902. Along the way, he became a devoted follower of Christ. During World War I,Dobbie served in France and Belgium and became General Staff Officer No. 1 under Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig. In that role, it became Dobbie's duty to compose and issue the "ceasefire" telegram on November 11, 1918, which said: "Hostilities will cease at 11:00 hours today. Troops will stand fast at the line reached at that hour." (Afterward when anyone asked him what he had done in World War I, he said, "I stopped it!")

After the war, Dobbie retired from military life; but when World War II burst across Europe, he offered his services to the Government and was given command of Malta, a strategic island 900 miles in any direction from the nearest friendly base. It was crucially located, and Mussolini boasted he would take the island in a matter of days. He hadn't counted on Old Dob Dob. Dobbie told the islanders that God was a Very Present Help in trouble, and he prepared the island for war. At first, his "air force" consisted of just four planes, only three of which could fly. They were dubbed "Faith," "Hope," and "Charity."

Against all odds, Malta did not fall. Allied battleships sailed into its harbor for repairs and were sitting ducks for the enemy, but somehow the ships were never hit. An Axis bomb fell through the roof of the village church (it was the third largest dome in the world), but for some reason it didn't go off. Under Dobbie's command, 275 German and Italian planes were destroyed, and 600 others badly damaged. Allied forces in Malta became a constant threat to the Axis supply line and prevented thousands of Axis planes from reaching Europe. All the while, Dobbie was praying, trusting God, quoting Scripture, and teaching the Bible. One of his officers later recalled, "There is in him an inner calm hard to explain." After the war, Dobbie wrote a book about his experiences and the Miracle of Malta. He entitled his account: A Very Present Help.

The title is from Psalm 46, which begins: God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

That has always been of the greatest comfort for the people of God. That has always been their greatest secret, their deepest comfort, their strongest weapon. The Lord is near, the Lord is here; He is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

4. Don't Worry About Anything (Php 4:6a)

And then we have the fourth element in Paul's list, and it is startling to read. It goes against all our human impulses: Don't worry about anything. Do not be anxious about anything.

Now, it's important to know that the Bible is not forbidding healthy concern, but unhealthy anxiety. Let me show you something about the word used here. Look at chapter 2, verses 19 and 20, of this same book of Philippians. The apostle Paul is commending to them his friend, Timothy. He says, "I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. I have no one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare."

Notice the words "genuine interest." In other words, Paul and Timothy were concerned about the people in this church. They were genuinely interested, concerned. That phrase is the very same word in the Greek as is translated worry or anxiety in Philippians 4:6. This is very instructive. The same Greek word is used, but the meaning is a little different because of the context. One time it is translated as concern ("genuine interest"), and the other time it is translated "anxiety."

I think the Lord is telling us something by the double use of this word in Philippians. He wants us to be deeply concerned about things, and about others. But He doesn't want that healthy concern to turn into unhealthy anxiety. There is a positive sense in which we care, but a negative since in which we worry. The mature, balanced Christian knows how to do the one and avoid the other. And how do we avoid it? By turning our worries into prayers, and that leads to Paul's fifth step.

5. Pray with Thanksgiving (Php 4:6)

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

For the last year or so, I've been working on a book project which aims to provide a hymn a day for devotional use, and in the process of researching all this, I came across a hymnist I had never before heard of. His name was Josiah Conder, and his hymns and poetry are just profound. Conder himself was an interesting character. He was born in London right after the American War of Independence. His grandfather was a preacher, and his father was a bookseller. When Josiah was five years old, they gave him an inoculation for smallpox, and it resulted in one eye going blind. They treated him with a new-fangled medical technique of giving him electrical shocks. I don't know if that had anything to do with it, but he went on to become a powerful writer, hymnist, journalist, abolitionist, and layman in the Congregational Church of England. I was very taken with one of his hymns, inspired by the story of the manna that God provided for the Children of Israel during their wilderness wanderings. This "bread" from heaven appeared every single day, and the Israelites were to gather just what they needed for that day. Here is Conder's hymn about it, and I want you to especially notice the last stanza.

Day by day the manna fell;
O to learn this lesson well!
Still by constant mercy fed,
Give me Lord, my daily bread.

"Day by day," the promise reads,
Daily strength for daily needs;
Cast foreboding fears away;
Take the manna of today.

Lord! My times are in Thy hand;
All my sanguine hopes have planned,
To Thy wisdom I resign,
And would make Thy purpose mine.

Oh, to live exempt from care
By the energy of prayer:
Strong in faith, with mind subdued,
Yet elate with gratitude!

That final stanza is what Paul is talking about here in Philippians 4: Oh, to live exempt from care by the energy of prayer! Strong in faith, with mind subdued, yet elate with gratitude!

6. Focus Your Mind on Excellent & Praiseworthy Thoughts (Php 4:8-9)

Paul's final technique for overcoming worry is to meditate on what is excellent and praiseworthy. Verses 8-9 say: "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you."

Since worry and anxiety are conditions of the mind, one of the best remedies is to push them aside with healthier thoughts. Romans 12 says that we are transformed by the renewing of our minds. And that's one of the reasons for memorizing Scripture.

Here at , one of our favorite families is Micah and Becky Derby and their twin boys. The Derbys were preparing to go back to France as missionaries when Becky was diagnosed with breast cancer, which led to a prolonged, life-threatening nightmare, and many of us have followed their saga prayerfully.

Well, Micah's mother, Linda Derby, has written a book about it, and I had the opportunity of reading the unpublished draft, and I was

deeply moved by the fact that the entire story can be contained within these verses in Philippians. At every twist and turn in the story, this family had to discover the deepest realities of Philippians 4.

On the day of Beck's biopsy, the strain and worry was almost unbearable. After supper, Linda cleared the dinner table, excused herself, and retreated to her room. She opened her Bible and read Philippians 4 in the New Living Translation, and it was a powerful moment for her. She accepted the premise of this chapter and started presenting her requests to God. She prayed about everything her family was experiencing, their worries, fears, depression, anger, and uncertainly. She prayed as earnestly and as best as she knew how, and then she tried to think of all the things God had done for them and for which she could be thankful. To her surprise, she had quite a long list of thanksgiving items. She listed many of them in the manuscript of this book, including the fact that Micah and Becky had been stateside when the diagnosis was made, they were able to receive prompt medical care, they were under the care of highly skilled physicians, and they had a large support team in place.

And then Linda began to deliberately focus her mind on what was excellent and praiseworthy. Here's what she wrote in her manuscript:

I had done exactly what the Scriptures [specifically Philippians 4] had instructed. I told God what was wrong, what our family wanted and needed, and thanked Him for the good things He did during the worst of times. I also focused on the things that are excellent and worthy of praise. I praised God for all the blessings He had provided; I thanked God for His perfect timing that allowed Becky to be in the States when she was diagnosed with cancer. I thanked God for expediting treatment; I thanked God for His watchful care.

Now, I cannot explain the peace that comes in the midst of a terrible storm, but it does come when Christians pray to their Heavenly Father and follow His instructions. As might be expected, God was true to His Word: Our hearts and minds were being guarded by power from on high and we were able to survive the immediate weight of this burden. He cleared the worry bugs from the flypaper. My husband and I were able to go to bed with peace in our hearts and we enjoyed a restful night in the Lord. (From an unpublished manuscript, "Life's Sticky Wicks" by Linda Derby, used with permission.)

This is one of the most valuable passages in all the Scripture for mental and spiritual wellbeing. It's worked for thousands of years in thousands of lives, and it's as potent and strong and true now as it ever was.

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Strength
Philippians 4:13
Robert Morgan

Two aged men – Prisoner A and Prisoner B – sat in cells across from one another amid the squalor of a brutal penitentiary, a dungeon. They were old revolutionaries who had been captured in different locations, fighting for different causes. Neither had known the other until now. They were chained like animals, and their surroundings were wretched. There was no climate control in this prison—no heat or air-conditioning. Depending on the time of year, the prisoners would freeze or fry. There was no electricity. No electric lights. No indoor plumbing, no sanitation, no running water. No cleaning services. No medical attention. There were no hot showers or clean linens. The stench was horrid, and the food was filthy and insufficient. The men were always hungry. The primitive conditions were designed to strip the prisoners of all morale and hope. It was like being sealed alive in a loathsome tomb.

All of this had finally gotten to Prisoner B, and he was a broken man, overcome with suicidal despair. But a few yards away in the opposite cell, Prisoner A was far more resolute. In fact, he was downright gutsy. He seemed immune to giving up. Sure, he had his moments of discouragement—anyone would; but he knew how to shake them off. He had learned through many hard experiences how to make the best of any situation, even under the worst of circumstances. He was downright cheerful.

> Two men looked through prison bars.
> One saw mud; the other saw stars.

Finally Prisoner B couldn't take it any more. "What's wrong with you?" he shouted to his neighbor. "Don't you know we're doomed? Don't you know we're lost? Don't you know we're going to starve to death, or freeze to death, or be beaten to death, or tortured to

death? Don't you know that no one cares any longer?"

Prisoner A looked up at him from the letter he was writing. "Are you talking to me?" he asked as he clutched at his thin blanket and tightened it across his shoulders.

"Yeah, you. I'm talking to you. I'm fed up with you and your cheerfulness. I'm miserable and any normal man in our circumstances would be miserable. I think you are insane."

Prisoner A thought about that for a moment, then he said, "Well, maybe I am. But you know what? I've got some friends and they've just sent me some money. And I know how to get things. I can send someone to buy us some food and some blankets and some underwear and some soap, and I'll share that stuff with you. My friends would want me to. What I'm doing just now is writing a letter to thank them for their gift. At least, it started out as a thank you note; but I've gotten carried away and have written a veritable epistle. Here, let me read you a little of what I've written. I'd like to get your opinion. Just a few sentences. Here's what I wrote in the first part of the letter.

Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the Gospel. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. And because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the Gospel without fear...

For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

"I especially like that last sentence, don't you? It sums everything up very nicely. That's why I can make the best of things under the worst of circumstances. Here, let me read from the second part of the letter."

Have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to His own advantage; rather, He made Himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knees should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

"I like the way that sounds, even if I say so myself. It's downright inspired. Here's something from the third part of the letter:

One thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

"So my dear friend, while you sit there bemoaning the past and cursing present, I'm sitting here planning the future. I believe with all my heart that my best days are ahead of me, and I'm pressing in a forward direction with all my strength."

"Now, just when you interrupted me I was getting to the last part of my letter. Here, let me read it to you so you can tell me what you think: Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and petition let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

"Anyway, if I seem in good spirits, that's why. I've been working on this letter all day long and it's been very therapeutic to me. The more I think about these things and write them down for others, the more I realize it's very possible for me to stay in the best of spirits during the worst of times. I can do that. In fact, I can do all this through the One who infuses me with strength."

Prisoner B took in all this. Then, rubbing his matted and filthy beard, he squinted across the dim little corridor and said, "Now I get it. You must be Saint Paul the Apostle."

"At your service!" said Prisoner A. "Now would you like to hear the ending I've composed to the letter?"

"Might as well," said Prisoner B. "There's nothing else to do. Besides, it might do me some good."

Well, it might do all of us some good, so what don't we read it together? It's found in Philippians 4:10-20. This is the last major paragraph and the final postscript of the letter of the apostle Paul to the Philippians. This is the personal ending in which he thanked the Christians in the city of Philippi for the offering they had sent him by the hand of a man named Epaphroditus. This morning, I'd like for us to look at this postscript, this ending to the letter of Philippians, and let's notice what it says, what it means, and what it means to us.

Philippians 4:13 -- What Does It Say?

Let's begin by reading Philippians 4:10-20 to see what it says.

I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through Him who gives me strength.

Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid more than once when I was in need. Not that I desire your gifts; what I desire is that more be credited to your account. I have received full payment and have more than enough. I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of His glory in Christ Jesus. To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.

It's clear that the apostle Paul was imprisoned, almost certainly in Rome, and the Philippians had sent someone named Epaphroditus to him with an infusion of cash. Prisoners in those days could send out and buy things if they had money, and this gift came just when Paul most needed it. So he wrote them a thank you note, and he used it as an occasion to give them a lot of testimony and teaching throughout the entire book. Now, near the end, he takes the opportunity to express his appreciation. Even something as simple and pedestrian as this, however, becomes an occasion for teaching, and in verses 13 and 19, we have two tremendous verses—that we can do all things through Christ, and that Christ will meet all our needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:13—What Does It Mean?

Now, let's focus on the first few verses of the paragraph and ask, "What does it mean?" I want to show you three key terms here.

The first word is ALL: The first word is the word all. Notice that it shows up in both verse 13 and verse 19: "I can do all things through Christ... and my God will meet all your needs accord to the riches of His glory in Christ."

I love the word "all" in the Bible. I once looked up every occurrence of the word "all" in Scripture and wrote a book about it entitled All to Jesus. Some of our greatest promises (and commands) are modified by that word "all." The Bible says...

- All things work together for good to those who love God.
- Goodness and mercy follow us all the days of our lives.
- We can cast all our cares on Him.
- If we seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, all these things will be added to us.

But the word "ALL" is not always used in the Bible in an absolute sense. Its specific meaning is always determined by its context. Sometimes the meaning of all is limited. Sometimes it is qualified by the passage. For example, here in Philippians 4:13, when Paul said he could do all things through Christ who strengthened him, he did not mean to say that he

could literally and actually do everything without qualification. What if Paul said, for example:

- I can do all things; I'm going to be like Moses and raise my rod and send catastrophic plagues on the Roman Empire?
- I can do all things; I'm going to be like Samson and tear this prison down with my bare hands.
- I can do all things; I'm going be like Elijah and call fire down from heaven.
- I can do all things; I'm going to be like Jesus, levitate into the sky, and disappear into the clouds.

The apostle said, "I can do all things," but he didn't mean he could do those things, for those things did not represent the will of God for his life. That's why the NIV translated this a little more carefully, and, I think accurately. I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through Him who gives me strength. Phil 4:11-12

In the immediate context of this passage, he was telling the Philippians that Jesus Christ was infusing him with strength in his spirit and strength in his soul so that he could make the best of things in the worst of conditions. He could be content. He could maintain a healthy attitude even while incarcerated by Rome.

The second word is LEARNED: Notice the word learned, which occurs twice here, for Paul repeats himself for emphasis: I have learned... I have learned...

I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through Him who gives me strength.

In other words, this attitude of making the most of things under the worst of circumstances, that was not intuitive to him. It didn't come naturally. This was an acquired education. It took time and spiritual insight and emotional growth and divine tutoring to get to this mindset and perspective.

Notice the word CONTENT, which also appears twice.

I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through Him who gives me strength.

I'm not sure the word content is the best or fullest translation of the Greek word Paul used, but it might be the best we can come up with in English. Paul didn't mean that he was satisfied. He didn't mean that he was complacent. He meant that he was self-sufficient in his attitude. He meant his joy and cheer and purpose and resolution in life were not damaged by his circumstances. He meant that whether he lived in a palace or a prison, he intended to have the same joy and the same sense of purpose. He meant that he could keep the best of spirits in the worst of conditions, and that he could make the most of things in the worst of times.

How did he do it? He said that he doesn't do it through his own inborn disposition or by the gift of a unique personality. This kind of self-sufficiency is derived from the One who infused Him with strength.

That is the narrow interpretation of this verse. Paul was saying, "Whatever the circumstances, in any and every situation, I can be self-sufficient, I can be resilient, I can be unbreakable and undefeated and victorious in my attitude. I can make the most of things under the harshest of conditions, through the One who enables me to do that. He infuses me with strength for this very thing."

This is the attitude of the Christian. Sometimes we're able to live without illness, travel where we want, and we're generally free from crippling problems. Other times we're in crisis or distress or under duress. But even when conditions are bleak, we can make the most of things through Him who enables us to maintain a positive attitude of faith.

But now, having understood that, I think we can make a wider application.

I think we have biblical authority to broaden this out. I think we can make this statement: Whatever represents God's will for me, whatever He sends me, wherever He sends me, whatever He calls me to do—if it is His will and His way—He will strengthen me to do it. Whatever attitudes He prescribes in the Bible, I can experience them. Whatever tasks He assigns, He will give me the strength to accomplish. I can do whatever He says and obey Him in every way, for I can do all things through the one who gives me strength.

Philippians 4:13—What Does It Mean to Me?

And that brings us to our final question: What does that mean to me? It means that Philippians 4:14 has application to our lives every day in a multitude of circumstances. Here is a verse we can claim in many different settings in life. Here is a verse we should keep near and dear to us.

Recently I was perusing book of devotions recently that had been written for high school students. In fact, it had been written by Christian high school girls for other high school girls. One of the entries was by a high school student in Raleigh, North Carolina. Her name is Allison Fisher, and she wrote, "There are a lot of things teens can worry about in high school, which can make trusting God difficult. I worry about my grades, getting sick, disappointing my family, and whether people like me or not. When I worry, I like to pray. Every time I have to take a test, I sit at my desk and pray before I start. Some people look at my funny, but it is just something I do. It always helps me feel better. When I am nervous about a big test or going through something difficult, one of my favorite verses to think of is Philippians 4:13, which says, 'I am able to do all things through Him who strengthens me.'"1

If God has placed you in school—if that represents His will for your life right now—it may or may not be in His plans for you to be valedictorian of your class. But we can be pretty certain of His will. It's His will for you to do your best, trust Him when you have to take tests, seek to build friendships so you can share your faith, and have a good high school experience. You can do that, through Him who infuses you with strength.

The other day, I read something similar by the Atlanta preacher, Dr. Charles Stanley. He said Philippians 4:13 was a great help to him when he was a young person. He knew there were certain things he needed in his life, such as guidance and encouragement. On one occasion, he said, he was concerned about his grades in school. But he leaned on verses he found in the Bible. "One of my favorites is Philippians 4:13, 'I can do all things through Him who strengthens me,'" said Stanley. "I realized with Him help I could do whatever He had given me to do."2

Years ago, I remember hearing Billy Graham say (or perhaps I read this), that sometimes before he had to speak to a vast crowd of people, perhaps tens of thousands or even hundreds of thousands, he would grow nervous and fear that he would fail. But he would meditate on Philippians 4:13, and that verse encouraged him go on.

As I prepared this sermon I read the testimony of a man named Ed Underwood, who came to Christ during the Jesus Movement of the 1960s and 70s, and who is now pastor of the Church of the Open Door in Southern California. He battles cancer, and he has written a book about it entitled When God Breaks Your Heart. Some years ago, Ed was diagnosed with malevolent lymphoma, which oncologists say leads to more suicide than any other cancer. It can product intense pain and unbearable itching, which, according to Ed Understood, can push the senses and the psyche to the limit. Ed said, “My unique pain centers on the flaming, all-consuming irritation of my skin.... The agony was excruciating. First the heat, then the insane itching, finally the weakness as I began shaking from the effect of exfoliating skin.” He described the pain so vividly I could almost feel it as he talked about the blood boring into the skin and heating it until it exfoliated and caused searing itching and intense pain all over his body. But here is what Underwood wrote, “Falling back on some of my favorite verses from the Scripture, or the most comforting truths about the personal relationship with the Lord Jesus I entered into as a young man, I repeat the verse or truth over and over again. I always begin with Philippians 4:13, a sentence from my Father’s Word that has seen me through these despairing times: ‘I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.’ Then I discipline my mind to say this over again and again with the emphasis on a different word each time.”

- I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.
- I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.
- I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.
- I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.
- I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.
- I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.
- I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.
- I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.
- I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.3

He said he then turns the verse into a prayer and begins to pray it in the moments of his greatest pain. That, he said, is how he learned to turn his illness into a blessing. He said, “This is not a ‘technique’ to pull out of your spiritual hat in a moment of need. This is a therapy for those who walk with Him. It is only by abiding in His love and guidance as we walk by the still waters of everyday life and learning to trust Him for the minor emergencies and disappoints that we gain the strength of faith and comforting truths that will steel our soul in our personal day of trouble.”4

I’m convinced that God wants us to be a stronger church with a stronger

witness and a stronger set of ministries; and the only way that can happen is when we become stronger people. We need to be stronger in our faith, stronger in our prayers, stronger as husbands and wives and parents, stronger in our testimony in school or the university. And the Bible promises that God will give His people strength.

• The Bible says: As your days so shall your strength be.

• The Bible says: The eyes of the Lord range to and fro throughout all the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to Him.

• The Bible says: Those who trust in the Lord will renew their strength; they will mount up with wings like eagles.

• The Bible says that God will strengthen us with power in our inner beings out of the resources of His grace.

• The Bible says, “I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.”

And that’s why...

Two men looked through bars.
One saw mud; the other saw stars.

Endnotes

1 Allison Fisher, in Teen to Teen: 365 Daily Devotions by Teen Girls for Teen Girls, edited by Patti M. Hummel (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2013), 119.

2 Charles Stanley, 10 Principles for Studying Your Bible (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1008), 131.

3 Ed Underwood, When God Breaks Your Heart: Choosing Hope in the Midst of Faith-Shattering... (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2008), 165-166.

4 Ed Underwood, When God Breaks Your Heart: Choosing Hope in the Midst of Faith-Shattering... (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2008), 170.

What's Wrong With Entertainment?
Philippians 4
Robert Morgan

"So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over the sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.
You, however, did not come to know Christ in that way (Ephesians 4:17-20).

Today we're continuing our nasty, negative little sermon series entitled What's Wrong With…. We're already looked at What's Wrong with Religion and What's Wrong with Worshipping at the Lake. Now today I'd like to deal with the subject What's Wrong with Entertainment.

That's not only the subject of our message today, it's also the cover story for the current edition Entertainment Weekly. This is a magazine that touts and promotes the world of entertainment, written by men and women who are submerged in the entertainment world and presumably very liberal and open in their threshold of tolerance.

And yet even Entertainment Weekly is disgusted, and the cover of the magazine says: "Special Report: Are There No Limits? Filth, Raunch, Violence, & Hate Rule Pop Culture--Has Showbiz Finally Gone Too Far?"

Inside the magazine, the article, which is essentially an essay, written by Lisa Schwarzbaum, says: "Disgusting lyrics. Privates on parade. Anything--and we mean anything--for a laugh. When did the showbiz catchphrase 'Let's do lunch' suddenly become 'Let's do raunch'? And do audiences even care anymore?"

The writers then describe scenes from current popular movies and television shows that I can't read because they're not appropriate for the pulpit. Then Ms. Schwarzbaum writes:

/As the networks, worried about shrinking viewership, chase after the cable audience with edgier fare like CBS's Big Brother (lately a nightly stew of bleeped dialogue and bubbling sexual tension), the cable channels push the limits even further: MTV's sex series Undressed is practically prepping teens for late-night Skinemax….

If anything goes--a state of abandon and rebellion humans have pursued for years… then these days we're going particularly fast and far.
The notion of indecency has become obsolete.

And yet, we haven't reached the bottom of the cesspool yet. The article quotes one of the hosts of a Comedy Central show as saying, "When it comes to sexuality and profanity, TV and movies have got a long way to go."

Pollutes Our Children

There are many things wrong with entertainment today, but I just want to mention four. First, modern entertainment in today's popular culture corrupts our children. There has been out outcry in Middle Tennessee the last month or so about the several sewage spills that have polluted our beautiful rivers. Last month as many as 3 million gallons of raw sewage were released into the Harpeth River. This past week, nearly a half million gallons were dumped into Hurricane Creek Up in Wilson County, nearly 100,000 gallons polluted Stoner Creek. Thousands upon thousands of fish and other forms of wildlife have died, and who knows the toll on human life.

But where is the concern about the millions of minutes of moral sewage being pumped into our children's minds day after day through television and movies and other forms of entertainment?

The devil has found an almost irresistible tool to poison and destroy the spiritual lives of an entire generation of children.

We are living in days very like those of Sodom and Gomorrah. Jesus said in Luke 18 that at the time of His coming, world conditions morally would be just like those in the days of Sodom and Gomorrah. He said:

> It will be the same as during the time of Lot. People were eating, drinking, buying, selling, planting, and building. But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from the sky and killed them all. This is how it will be when the Son of Man comes again.

But what was Lot's attitude as he lived in the midst of Sodom and Gomorrah? In 2 Peter 2, the Bible again compares the times of Sodom and Gomorrah with the world at the time of Christ's return. Peter writes:

> If (God) did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood on its ungodly people, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others; if he condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; and if he rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard) — if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment. This is especially true of those who follow the corrupt desire of the sinful nature and despise authority.

It says that Lot was tormented in his righteous soul by the corruption around him, and I think one of the reasons for his anguish was this: he knew what it was doing to his own children, to his two daughters, and to his very family.

Without proper guidance from you and me and without the grace of Jesus Christ, the slime and filth of television and film will pollute our children.

Warps our Morals

Second, today's entertainment lowers our morals. J. Oswald Sanders:

> "The mind is the battleground on which every moral and spiritual battle is fought."

In Romans 16:19, Paul writes,

> "Everyone has heard about your obedience, so I am full of joy over you; but I want you to be wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil."

Today's entertainment plants into our minds filthy words and unholy images that we can replay over and over on our VCRs. Even as a Christian community we are becoming desensitized morally, and today we laugh at things that would have horrified us ten years ago.

Wastes our Time

Third, entertainment wastes our time. Michael Crichton is one of today's most brilliant writers and producers. His most recent book, Timeline, has been on the best-seller list for quite awhile, and in that book he himself has something interesting to say on this subject. He has a character named Robert Doniger who is the CEO of an enormous and highly secretive technology company. Near the end of the book, Doniger is addressing a group of people in his company's auditorium, and this is what he says: In other centuries, human beings wanted to be saved, or improved, or freed, or educated. But in our century, they want to be entertained. The great fear is not of disease or death, but of boredom. A sense of time on our hands, a sense of nothing to do. A sense that we are not amused. But where will this mania for entertainment end?"

There should be a basic difference between Christians and non-Christians regarding the whole concept of leisure. To the world, leisure and entertainment is the ultimate goal. They work hard in order to make enough money to live a good life, a life of leisure, a life of entertainment.

The Christian, on the other hand, is here on assignment. Ephesians 2:10 says, "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." We only have a few short years to complete our work for God, and the Bible tells us to redeem the time, for the days are evil. Psalm 90 says, "Lord, teach us to number our days that we may present to you a heart of wisdom."

Now we are not machines who can work twenty-four hours a day without rest. God created us with a need for certain amounts of leisure and relaxation. But the main difference is this: The world works in order to take its leisure. We Christians view our leisure time as necessary to refresh us for the work God has given us to do. The world works in order to relax, and the Christian relaxes in

order to work.

That may seem like a simple, trite, little phrase; but it expresses a profound difference between the believer and the non-believer in this world.
Those without Christ have no hope, no Christ, no eternal home to anticipate. They have no purpose or driving reason for life. So they drown themselves in leisure and pastimes, diverting themselves from the despair of their lives.

But the Christian should not spend hour after hour watching television day after day and night after night. We have a higher calling. We are here for a nobler purpose.

I think it would be a good idea if we placed a copy of Psalm 119:37 on the top of our television screens: Turn my eyes away from worthless things.

Cheapen Our Thoughts

Finally, today's entertainment misuses our minds. In Philippians 4, the apostle Paul gives us one of his greatest passages as he talks about overcoming stress and tension in our daily lives. He writes

> Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

In that last paragraph, he tells us that our thought and minds should dwell on eight things. First, whatever is true. I'd like to just list these for you from the original Greek and briefly explain the meaning. Our thoughts should dwell on things that are:

True: - True and honest. The Gospel of John uses this set of words more than all of the other three gospels combined. Matthew uses this group of words 5 times, Mark 6 times, Luke 7 times, but John uses them 54 times. That which is true is that which corresponds most perfectly with Jesus Christ and His Word. In John 14, Jesus said, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life." In John 17, He said, "Thy Word is truth." We should exercise great caution in feeding our minds on books, programs, magazines, movies, and philosophies that are more in line with Satan's lies than with God's truth.

Noble: - Honorable, pertaining to what is worthy of respect, grave, honest. Pertaining to appropriate, befitting behavior and implying dignity and respect - 'honorable, worthy of respect, of good character. The word points to seriousness of purpose and to self-respect in conduct" (Moule). This set of words (semnos / semnotas) occurs only 7 times in Bible; once here in Philippians 4, and all the other times in 1 Timothy and Titus when elders and deacons are described as people who should be dignified, grave, serious, holy, and worthy of respect.

Right: - Righteous, just, upright, i.e., being in accordance with God's compelling standards. Innocent.

Pure: - This is the word Paul used in 1 Timothy 5:22 when he said, "Keep yourselves pure," and it's the word John uses in 1 John 3:3 when he says that everyone who has within himself the hope of the Second Coming purifies himself.

Lovely: - pleasing or lovely - from a Greek root word which means brotherly love. Things that are harmonious and pleasant.

Admirable: - The word itself means, literally, good saying. That is, something that everyone can speak well about. Pertaining to deserving approval or good reputation.

Excellent: - Refers to moral excellence. When was the last time you went to a movie that you could describe as morally excellent?

Praiseworthy: - Something that is commendable, worthy of being praised.

I like the way Eugene Peterson renders this verse in his translation or paraphrase, The Message: Summing it all up, friends, I'd say you'll do best by filling your minds and meditating on things true, noble, reputable, authentic, compelling, gracious--the best, not the worst; the beautiful, not the ugly; things to praise, not things to curse.

This isn't a new problem, of course. When the famous St. Augustine was a schoolmaster, very early in his career, he had a student named Alypius with whom he developed a mentoring relationship. Alypius was a brilliant student, and Augustine admired him and was very proud of him. Alypius was a young man of virtue who tried to keep himself relatively pure and noble in the world, and, accordingly, he detested the entertainment of his day. That entertainment consisted chiefly of the gladiatorial games of the Roman

Empire. He was repulsed by the thought of pitting slaves against wild animals or against other gladiators to fight to the death in front of a frenzied crowd.

But one day by chance Alypius met a group of his fellow students who were returning from dinner and they put pressure on him to go to the games with them. In fact, they were quite forceful. They finally coerced him, against his better judgment, to the amphitheater. He went under protest, saying: "Though you drag my body to that place and set me down there, you cannot force me to give my mind or lend my eyes to these shows. Thus I will be absent while present, and so overcome both you and them."

At any rate, they dragged him along with them, through the gates and to the best seats they could get in the coliseum, which soon became a tumult of inhuman frenzy. Alypius sat there with his eyes squeezed tightly shut, forbidding his mind to gaze upon the scene of moral wicked that surrounded him. But he couldn't close his ears, and when one of the combatants fell in the fight, a mighty cry rose up from the whole audience. Alypius was so overcome by curiosity that he opened his eyes for just a moment, and the drama of the games shot into his mind like a sword and transfixed him.

Augustine later wrote, "As soon as he saw the blood, he drank in with it a savage temper, and he did not turn away, but fixed his eyes on the wicked contest…. He was no longer the same man who came in…." Alypius was instantly addicted to this evil entertainment, and that is the way he lived until long afterward, when both he and Augustine were converted to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Please do not be deceived by the wiles of the devil. He wants to pollute our children, to warp our morals, to waste our time, and to cheapen our thoughts. Use greater discretion in what you watch and see and read and hear.

> Let this mind be in you which also was in Christ Jesus. And Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things…. And the God of peace will be with you.

Prayer for Discerning Love
Philippians 1:9–11
William Graham Scroggie

INTRODUCTION: Love is the supreme proof of the reality of our Christian profession.

1. Love's Perfecting Unfolded.
   A. Enlargement of Love (v. 9). "I pray that your love may abound more and more …"
   B. Enrichment of Love (v. 9). "In real knowledge and all discernment …"
   C. Employment of Love (v. 10). "So that you may approve the excellent things …"
2. Love's Perfecting Displayed.
   A. Trueness of Conscience (v. 10). "In order to be sincere …"
   B. Consistency of Conduct (v. 10). "In order to be blameless …"
   C. Fullness of Character (v. 11). "Having been filled with the fruit of righteousness …"
3. Love's Perfecting Revealed.
   A. Ruling Motive (v. 10). "Until the day of Christ …"
   B. Divine Secret (v. 11). "Through Jesus Christ …"
   C. Ultimate Object (v. 11). "To the glory and praise of God …"

CONCLUSION: May we seek and receive true Christian love.