

Standing Firm in Christ

Philippians 4:4-9 - NCBC, March 15, 2020

Main Point: **Knowing Christ secures our peace and enables us to stand firm in troubled times.**

- Rejoice in Christ, not circumstances (4:4)
- Serve Christ through generosity, not selfishness (4:5)
- Pray to Christ with thanksgiving, not unbelief (4:6)
- Fill your mind with Christ, not media (4:7-8)
- Follow Christ, not your emotions (4:9)

Application: **Pray to our God of peace with thanksgiving.**

Opening Announcements:

- **Jane van den Berg Retirement Tour** – Today we have a great opportunity to bless our faithful sister as she returns to the States after many fruitful decades of ministry as one of our supported Global Partners in Cote D'Ivoire Africa. Please consider giving to a special retirement offering today (either at the exit or via online) to bless our sister as she transitions to this new chapter of life effective April 2020.
- **Women's Refresh Event** is still scheduled for March 27th at 6pm. Register today on using the Connection Card or the NCBC app.

<<O for a Thousand Tongues>>



It's so good to sing praises to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ today. If we had 1,000 tongues, there would be no greater way to employ all of them than in the praise of our God – our merciful Savior who forgives our sins.

Let's continue our worship now by opening our Bibles to **Philippians chapter 4, verses 4-9**. In light of the storm clouds of fear that are presently sweeping across our nation due to the coronavirus epidemic, I've decided to interrupt our study of Matthew's Gospel and preach a special message this morning from **Philippians chapter 4**. These are days of high anxiety, and the Scriptures before us today offer hope, and promise, and peace to all who have ears to hear its good news today.

Before I read this Scripture, let me briefly remind us of its context. We know from **verse 1 of chapter 1** that **Philippians** was written by the apostle Paul to the small group of believers gathered back in Philippi in Macedonia. When Paul wrote this letter, he was in a Roman prison, chained to Roman guards even as he dictated this letter through Timothy.

Just imagine for a moment this historical reality.

Paul is in prison again for no other reason except preaching salvation by faith alone in Christ's finished work on the cross.

The Philippians loved Paul. They were the first church Paul planted in Europe during his second missionary journey.¹ So when they discovered Paul was imprisoned in Rome, they took up a financial collection for Paul² and sent a care team led by Epaphroditus³ to serve Paul's needs. Unfortunately however, similar to New Castle's recent care team to North Africa last month, Epaphroditus became very ill upon his arrival to Rome, and nearly died.⁴

So Paul is now sending Epaphroditus back to Philippi, carrying this letter. He's writing to thank them for their financial gift⁵ and for sending Epaphroditus to him.⁶ He wants to update them on how he's doing in prison.⁷ And he's writing to encourage them to stand firm in the joyful unity of Christ in the midst of these troubled times.⁸ The church must not allow the pressures of persecution or pestilence to divide their unity or discourage their joy. Paul wants Christians to stand firm against false teachers⁹ and live in joy regardless of their circumstances.¹⁰

So Paul's letter to the Philippians offers very relevant and timely instruction for our hearts today, teaching us how to *Stand Firm in Christ*.

¹ Acts 16:12-40

² Philippians 4:10

³ Philippians 2:25-30

⁴ Philippians 2:27

⁵ Philippians 4:10-18

Let's stand in honor of the public reading of God's Word. From the English Standard Version, I'll read from **Philippians chapter 4, verse 4:**

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. ⁵ Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; ⁶ do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. ⁸ Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. ⁹ What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me— practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

This is God's Word. Please be seated.

Let's Pray.

The coronavirus pandemic has already affected every one of our lives in some way or other. Children and youth have experienced the cancellation of schools and the loss of beloved extra-curricular activities. Every adult in our church has been impacted economically – whether

⁶ Philippians 2:26-27

⁷ Philippians 1:12-26

⁸ Philippians 2:1-2, 4:1-2

⁹ Philippians 3:1-4:1

¹⁰ Philippians 1:4, 18, 25, 26; 2:2, 16-18, 28; 3:1, 3; 4:1, 4, 10

through stock market instability, the loss of business, or just the consequences of having to secure unplanned childcare because of school closings. Our senior population is now sheltering under strong health warnings and the recognition of previously unknown vulnerabilities. And all these stressors are being experienced even before any of us have personally been diagnosed with coronavirus!

Now certainly some of these consequences are simply the good results of our leaders being responsible on our behalf. However, we can't deny that fear's tentacles have dug themselves deep into the American psyche in recent days.

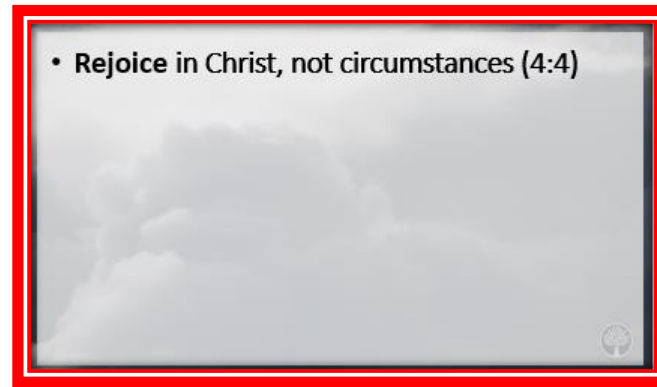
And it's against this strong current of fear and anxiety that **Philippians 4** offers a practical response of hope and peace. In **verses 4-9**, Paul shows us how,



Knowing Christ secures our peace and enables us to stand firm in troubled times. We don't need to get swept away by this tsunami of fear. We don't need to lose our witness of joy in these troubled times. We don't need to

panic. Knowing Christ secures our peace. We can stand firm in the Lord because we are confident of His love for us.¹¹

So let's walk through this text, starting in **verse 4** where Paul teaches us to,



Rejoice in Christ, not circumstances (4:4)

Look at **verse 4**,

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.

Paul here is exhorting the entire Philippian congregation—Rejoice! Keep on being glad. We must never allow difficult circumstances to suffocate our true joy of knowing Christ.

Now how can Paul double-command Christians to always rejoice? Is he just asking us to paste a plastic smile on our face that doesn't account for the serious and grave circumstances around us?

¹¹ Philippians 4:1
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No. This is not a call to some kind of fake cheerfulness. Paul knows well his own jailhouse troubles. Paul is aware of the serious division between Euodia and Syntyche back in Philippi in **verse 2**. It's just that Paul is calling us to look *to God's character and work* for the source of our joy...even when we are in the middle of great distress.

Notice what **verse 4** says: *Rejoice in the Lord* always.

No matter what sickness or disease, or pestilence, or division, or economic loss or world war... Christian – always rejoice that your name is written in the book of life, **chapter 4 verse 3**.¹² Always rejoice that difficult times increase the opportunities to preach Christ – **chapter 1 verse 18**. Rejoice that Jesus never wastes the suffering of His children, but uses it to bring about His glory – **chapter 2 verses 17-18**.

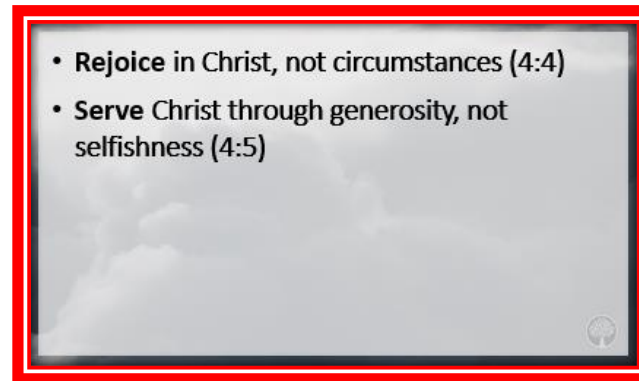
We must never allow the darkness of present storms to blind us from seeing God's eternal glories!

Notice Paul's doubling down in **verse 4** – *again I say rejoice*. Keep on rejoicing in your privileged position in Christ as one of His earthly ambassadors – regardless of what difficulties may come upon you. Contrary to the fickle perspectives of earth-bound unbelievers, external circumstances are never intended the source of our identity or life.¹³

If you have been born again by faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ on your behalf, Christ's Spirit is in you, resulting in joy!¹⁴ In fact, God sovereignly

entrusts trials and tribulation to His children as the backdrop for our bright witness of joy in this present age.¹⁵

So Christian – we should not panic when life gets difficult. True lasting joy is only found in knowing Christ. Don't lose your perspective. Stand firm in this storm by always continuing to rejoice in the sufficiency of Christ and His saving grace towards undeserving sinners like you and me.



Second you stand firm in trouble when you **Serve Christ through generosity, not selfishness (4:5)**

Paul writes from his prison cell in **verse 5**,

Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand;

Now reasonableness, or gentleness, is a rare jewel of Christian contentment today. This word refers to a humble attitude of patient endurance. Reasonableness

¹² C.f. Luke 10:20

¹³ Romans 14:17

¹⁴ Galatians 5:22-23

¹⁵ Matthew 5:16; James 1:2-4; 1 Peter 2:12

is the opposite of selfishness or self-protectionism. It is a spirit of selfless generosity that has a winsome influence towards others in times of widespread distress.

Now, this is practical for today isn't it? Last week we chuckled with Pastor Jonathan about our tendency to shop in bulk and hoard up 48 bags of goldfish. Little did we know that this week we'd encounter a nation-wide shortage of toilet paper and cleaning supplies in our stores!

Christian, our security is eternally in Christ, not in physical stockpiling on this earth. Remember the foolish farmer who built bigger barns?¹⁶ God is not glorified by self-preservation.¹⁷ Look carefully at **verse 5** and realize this is in the context of very dark and difficult trials: *Let your generosity be known* – publicly and indiscriminately – *to everyone*.

This coronavirus creates amazing opportunities for selfless generosity. There's nothing wrong with responsible planning while we still ultimately trust in the Lord.¹⁸ However when disaster strikes, it's time for the church to sacrificially serve our neighbors with God's mercy and love.

Our medical professionals and first responders are a good illustration of this. When most people fearfully stockpile or protect themselves, these souls sacrificially race towards the most contagious – fully aware of the risks that their generosity brings upon their own lives.

So let me just say this today... if you are medical professional or a first responder in our community – thank you! We see you. We are praying for you! And we are humbled and blessed by you. God's church desires to serve right alongside you however we can for the duration of this epidemic.

We want our generosity to be shown to everyone... so if there's *any* creative ways that our church family can be of help to you or your team, please let us know. We are very grateful for your sacrificial generosity every day.

Now Christian, don't miss the important motivation at the end of **verse 5** for our generosity:

The Lord is at hand.

This has a two-fold meaning. Jesus is always-present with us by His Spirit, and He will physically return soon to establish Shalom upon the earth.¹⁹

This is a powerful incentive for us to give our lives away sacrificially for the eternal good of others. Jesus is here with us right now by His Spirit – He sees all, and He knows all, and He's coming back soon to reward all!

So God has not forgotten you. He is here with you. Don't waste this unique opportunity to shine His glory brightly into the darkness. Serve Christ through generosity, not selfishness.

Now in **verse 6** Paul directly addresses the anxious emotions we've experienced this week. And isn't it

¹⁶ Luke 12:16-31, especially verse 20

¹⁷ Luke 9:23-24

¹⁸ C.f. Joseph's example in Genesis 41:34-36

¹⁹ Cf. James 5:8

interesting that Paul commands us to stop being anxious? He knows the Philippians are already anxious. So he exhorts us to stop, and replace our anxiety with prayer.

Look at the verse,

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

In other words,

- **Rejoice in Christ**, not circumstances (4:4)
- **Serve Christ** through generosity, not selfishness (4:5)
- **Pray to Christ** with thanksgiving, not unbelief (4:6)

Pray to Christ with thanksgiving, not unbelief (4:6)

Like we learned back in November from **Matthew chapter 6**, anxiety betrays what we really believe about God and our own ability to truly control our own lives.

If you believe you ultimately control your health, your life, your death, and your family – then your soul will be paralyzed by the realization that your life, and your extracurriculars and your health and your finances are all being radically affected by things outside of your control.

But if you remember what Jesus teaches about the character of our God in **Matthew chapter 6**,

Standing Firm in Christ

- God is a Creator who Sustains (24-25)
- God is a Father who Cares (26-31)
- God is a King who Provides (32-34)

Matthew 6:24-34

You will remember that our **God is our Creator who Sustains us, our Father who cares for us, and our King who provides all that we truly need.**

So coronavirus is here. The medical community is predicting that it's here to stay, and that most of us will likely be infected at some time or other. Some may experience severe symptoms...others may not even realize they have it. But how does the coronavirus reveal our true beliefs about God and our relationship with Him?

Paul is emphatically urging us to stop the natural reaction of double-minded fears. Anxiety fails to trust God. Anxiety is a sin of unbelief. So Paul urges us to starve anxious thoughts with thankful prayers.

- Rejoice in Christ, not circumstances (4:4)
- Serve Christ through generosity, not selfishness (4:5)
- Pray to Christ with thanksgiving, not unbelief (4:6)

Prayers of worship and thanksgiving. Paul uses 3 words as synonyms in **verse 6**, *prayer, supplication, and requests*. All these words express the Christian's action of laying our concerns before the Lord. Casting our cares upon Him...in thanksgiving...because we know that He cares for us!²⁰

Church, our God is our Shepherd.²¹ Our Refuge.²² Our Heavenly Father.²³ When you are constantly rejoicing in who He is, you will pray for your real needs with thanksgiving...for you know that your God is good and still in control... using the darkest moments to bring about His glory on the earth through the witness of His children.

And then in **verses 7-8**, Paul urges us to...

- Rejoice in Christ, not circumstances (4:4)
- Serve Christ through generosity, not selfishness (4:5)
- Pray to Christ with thanksgiving, not unbelief (4:6)
- Fill your mind with Christ, not media (4:7-8)

Fill your mind with Christ, not media (4:7-8)

After all, the result of our rejoicing, generosity, and prayer is that,

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

This is an amazing promise church! This is not a hopeful wish. This is a promise of God ... no matter whether your specific prayer requests are answered the way you want them to be or not... God promises that those who are rejoicing in the Lord always, and who are serving everyone with humble generosity, and who are praying with thanksgiving... will have their minds guarded by the very peace of God.

Now the peace of God is deeper than a mere feeling or calm. It's God's shalom. It's salvation. It's the presence of God's righteousness. It's the peace of **Romans 5:1** that only comes with being justified by faith in Christ.

²⁰ 1 Peter 5:6-7

²¹ Psalm 23

²² Psalm 91

²³ Matthew 6:4, 6, 8, 14, 26, 32

So the result of living according by **verses 4-6** is that God's salvation will stand guard over your soul.

God protects His redeemed – and specifically His salvation guards our hearts and minds – our entire personhood of emotion, will, affections, and thinking.

That is why then **verse 8** gets very practical about our thought life:

Finally brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

Here are six separate commands to fill our minds with thoughts that are inherently good and beneficial for others.

Now I don't know about you, but so often this past week I was running to the news to stay informed... or I was tempted to just binge watch a show to just check out for a while. And of course, don't misunderstand, there's nothing wrong with staying informed, and getting proper rest. But isn't it interesting how Paul redirects our minds from his own prison cell of difficulty?

Whatever is *true* is real, rather than apparent. Focus your mind on facts more than future possibilities.

Whatever is *honorable* is respectful and noble – not vulgar or sarcastic. Suspicious voices of conspiracy are

not going to help us stand firm in God's peace in these days.

Whatever is *just* refers to whatever is righteous or conformed to the standard of God's law of love.

Whatever is *pure* speaks to those thoughts and purposes which are morally or sexually unpoluted and singular in their affection for Christ.

Whatever is *lovely* refers to what is attractive and gracious – giving pleasure to all. Think about what could inspire agreeableness with others.

Whatever is *commendable* is that which is kind. In other words, focus your attention on what will draw people together, not drive them apart.

So here's Paul's point: In times of trouble, Christians should focus their minds and plan to act in accordance to whatever is good and deserving of praise. God's children should continually think about, or fill their minds with all of these positive and wholesome qualities... which are so different from the click-bait headlines of our world, right?

Church, I have absolutely no desire to regulate how we spend our time, or what sources of media we listen to. But I do pray we understand that all the loudest voices in our society today have agendas. So in all our data gathering and listening, may we fill our minds with Christ-honoring songs and Scripture, more than news or entertainment. Remember God's Word is a lamp to our feet, and a light to our path.²⁴ God promises to keep us in perfect peace, when our mind is fixed upon Him.²⁵

²⁴ Psalm 119:105

²⁵ Isaiah 26:3-4

Finally then in **verse 9**, Paul urges us to,

- **Rejoice** in Christ, not circumstances (4:4)
- **Serve** Christ through generosity, not selfishness (4:5)
- **Pray** to Christ with thanksgiving, not unbelief (4:6)
- **Fill your mind** with Christ, not media (4:7-8)
- **Follow** Christ, not your emotions (4:9)

Follow Christ and His example, not our emotions (4:9)

Paul urges the Philippians to imitate his own example that they have personally learned, received, heard, and seen from his own life.

Remember Paul understands what it is like to suffer profound loss and pain for the sake of Christ. Even this letter is written from unjust prison. But most importantly, Paul can urge us to imitate him since **1 Corinthians 11:1** says that Paul is simply imitating Christ Himself. Jesus is our example to follow. He is the suffering Servant who lived to serve, not to be served.

While our emotions are wonderful gifts from God Himself, they are not suitable masters. We must serve and follow Christ and His Words, no matter how we may feel when faced with particular distress.

So let's quickly review all we've learned so far:

First, God's children always rejoice in Christ, not our circumstances. We should use difficult circumstances to generously serve others, not ourselves. We must be a people who overcome doubt and unbelief with thanksgiving and prayer...as we intentionally fill our minds with more biblical truth than the worldly voices. If we keep putting all of this into practice... if we truly follow this Christ-like example, then we can have the assurance that *the God of peace will be with us* as it says at the end of **verse 9**.

Our God is a God of peace. A God of salvation. A God who brings the experience of righteousness – everything being made right – finally into reality for all who trust in Him.

God is our source of life; He is both willing and able to save to the uttermost all who trust in Him!²⁶



Knowing Christ secures our peace and enables us to stand firm in troubled times.

²⁶ Hebrews 7:25

So then, I believe the best response we could have this morning would be to,



Pray to our God of peace with thanksgiving.

Yesterday President Trump declared today as a National Day of Prayer for God's mercy regarding the coronavirus.

God is here today. The Lord is at hand. He is here to forgive sins, and guard our hearts and minds with His peace. He is here to teach us His truth and He is here to calm our fears. So will you pray to Him this morning?

I want to encourage us to all pray aloud – no matter if you are here in this room with us, or at home in a room all by yourself or with your family... if your health allows it, go ahead and kneel right where you are...and just pray aloud to God to make all your requests known to Him with thanksgiving.

Rejoice that your name is written in His book of life. Pray for God to bring you opportunities to love others well throughout this epidemic. Pray for wisdom for our leaders with thanksgiving. Pray for the humility and courage to follow Christ's example in your thinking, your speaking,

and your living. Pray for God's healing mercies upon the sick, and thank Him in advance for how He will use this pandemic for His greater glory on the earth.

After we've all prayed for a few minutes, I'll come and close us in prayer before we conclude our service with our final song together.

<<Prayer Time with instrumental music in background>>



Let's pray.

<<O Church Arise>>

Let's pray our benediction together as we dismiss.

Benediction

May my God supply every need of yours according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Philippians 4:19-20

*May my God supply every need of yours according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen. **Philippians 4:19-20***

**Many Hands
Make Light Work.**

Please share a few minutes to stack chairs & ready the Family Center for weekly activities.

*Thank You
New Castle!*

After 2nd Service Only

Recommended Resources on Standing Firm in Christ:

- Psalm 56:3; 94:19
- Proverbs 3:5-6; 25:28
- Isaiah 26:3-5; 41:10
- Matthew 6:24-34; 11:28-30
- Mark 4:35-41
- Luke 12:22-34
- John 14:1-14, 27
- Romans 8:32
- 1 Corinthians 7:29-32
- 1 Timothy 6:8
- 1 Peter 5:6-7

- *“Peace for Anxious Hearts”* sermon from John 14:1-14 preached on 10/16/16 at NCBC
- *“The Heart of Anxiety”* sermon from Matthew 6:24-34 preached on 11/24/19 at NCBC

- <https://www.desiringgod.org/series/do-not-be-anxious/labs>
- <https://biblicalcounseling.com/tag/anxiety/>
- <https://www.ccef.org/what-good-dont-worry-times-these/>
- <https://www.rightnowmedia.org/Training/Post/View/83371>
(Elyse Fitzpatrick on Worry)

- Overcoming Fear, Worry, and Anxiety, Elyse Fitzpatrick
- Worry: Pursuing a Better Path to Peace, David Powlison
- Fear: Breaking its Grip, Lou Priolo
- Battling Unbelief, John Piper

Growing Deeper: Life Group Questions

1. Review Matthew 6:25-34. How many times does Jesus command us to stop anxiety? Is anxiety an emotion? How should we think about biblical commands towards our emotions? What is the relationship between faith in biblical truth and anxiety?
2. Read 1 Peter 5:6-7. What is the connection between pride and anxiety? Peace and humility?
3. What most troubles your heart? Share together what Scriptures help to give peace to your heart in the midst of anxiety?
4. Review Matthew 6:30-32. Do you believe God loves you? Can you trust God’s fatherly provision for you? Why or why not?
5. Read Lamentations 3:21–23 (with Matthew 6:34). In God’s care and provision, what is the relationship between today’s grace and today’s trouble? What about between today’s grace and tomorrow’s trouble?
6. Read Matthew 6:33. What does it mean in practical terms for a person to “seek *first* the kingdom of God and his righteousness”?
7. Read Matthew 22:37-40, Galatians 5:13-14, and 1 John 4:7, 17-21. How could you practically love your neighbors in the next few weeks during this global coronavirus epidemic?