

Pathway to Peace
February 27, 2022
Philippians 4:4-9
Rick Buck

Introduction:

What a privilege to be with the Redeemer City church family this morning to open and share God's Word. I want to thank Pastor Levi for the invitation to come and be with you. Let me also formally welcome you on behalf of FEB Central to our Fellowship family. Last fall your leadership went through a process of affiliation with the Fellowship of Evangelical Baptist Churches in Canada. And we are thrilled to now be partners together in the gospel ministry. FEB Central is part of a family of churches across Canada. The FEB Central region (one of five; Ontario & anglophone churches in Quebec) includes almost 290 of those churches (**covers one million square km**). Our FEB Central team serves our churches by assisting them to thrive on mission for the gospel of Jesus Christ (we do that through three key priorities: Church Planting, Leadership Development and Church Health).

Life is a beautiful gift from God! Life, breath, and everything else comes from God (Acts 17:25). And yet as we have learned in the last 19 months, this gift is incredibly fragile and easily broken. So many today are feeling overwhelmed and vulnerable. Now, maybe more than ever before, we are realizing that we are not in control (see margin). The powerful temptation when this happens is to respond in fear and anxiety, when instead God wants us to find our refuge in Him and His peace in the storm. **Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid" (Jn. 14:27). Jesus gives us what this world can't give us – peace with God, one another, and within ourselves. Through our victorious Saviour and Lord, we can enjoy a true, deep and lasting peace from God, even in the most difficult circumstances of life. But I don't automatically experience this as a follower of Jesus. God calls us first to **understand it**, then **to live in it** and finally to **give it away** to others (see, savour, and share). How? **How do we take hold of the peace of God that is ours in Jesus Christ?****

The apostle Paul ends his letter to the Philippian believers with a series of **practical commands to grow deeper** in their life with Christ. These believers were experiencing difficult circumstances: **persecution** (cf. 1:27-28; 3:2; 18), **financial hardship** (see 2 Cor. 8:1-2), and **fractured relationships** (cf. 2:1-4; 4:2-3). In addition, Paul, their spiritual father was in prison. **They were feeling very much out of control.** With a pastor's heart, Paul tells them and us how we can **deal with all this stress of life and how we can let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts even on the roller coaster ride of life.**

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. Philippians 4:4-9

The first thing he says is **KEEP LOOKING UP IN FAITH! (v. 4). “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!”** The only way these Christians would find peace, joy and thankfulness in life is if we focus on God rather than on our circumstances. **The key to life is not where we are, but who we are in Jesus.** It isn't what happens to us, but how we respond to it. The only way you and I can truly be contented in our lives is **when we focus on the Lord, not on everything else. The Lord doesn't change, everything else does.** This is why he says “rejoice” always. **He can say this because it is about the one who is unchanging, in a changing world (“Rejoice in the Lord”).** Paul isn't saying just “suck it up buttercup” – i.e., be optimistic. He is saying choose a faith perspective that understands that our confidence is not in the fragile, fleeting, and fractured reality of the gift of this life, **BUT in what Jesus has done, is doing and will do in my life.** Knowing that God won't waste anything in my life but will use everything to give me my greatest good of being more like His Son (getting me ready for heaven), means that I can always rejoice (cf. Rom. 8:28-30). **Most people in the West are trying to bring peace to their lives by creating just the right environment (set of circumstances).** As a result, we try to control everything (all outcomes). But it doesn't take long to see that many things in our lives are beyond our puny little capacities. If circumstances are my measurement, I'll never experience joy and peace. But God in Christ gives us a way to experience a stable peace and contentment, in a very unstable world. **Cf. Phil. 4:12-13.** Through Christ, we can choose our attitude. We can rejoice because we know that what is of ultimate worth can't be taken from us. In fact, by faith we even know that our sovereign God mysteriously takes our pain and the effects of a fallen world to deepen our experience of Christ in our lives. God is able to make everything a servant to lead us to become more like Jesus. So, every circumstance becomes an opportunity for joy. **Attitude quote.**

There is a second way to let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts and lives. Paul says, **KEEP REACHING OUT IN LOVE! (v. 5). “Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand (or near).”** The way to find peace/joy is not by focusing on it but by focusing on doing God's will, **especially in loving others.** The NASB captures the sense of what Paul is saying here. **“Let your forbearing spirit be known to all men.”** Demonstrate humility, kindness and patience in the midst of a hostile world. Don't put a priority on your rights,

choosing to react in retaliation when others hurt you, but commit yourself to revealing God's gentle and forgiving love to a self-centred world. **One of the most frequent causes of stress and anxiety in our lives comes from being wrongly treated by those around us.** The temptation for all of us is to feed the cycle of hurt and selfishness by reacting in the same way we have been treated. The truth is that we can't change the world, but our greatest opportunity to influence it is by God's grace first changing us. **When people see God's peace operating in us, such that we become peacemakers, rather than escalators, they know something is different about us.** Paul isn't saying we are to be doormats, but we are to have the courage of faith to believe that God, not man has the final word. We are to live for the audience of the ONE (**"the Lord is near"**). Knowing that God sees and knows everything enables us to be gentle because we know He will be our vindicator. **Conclusion: I don't have to go around as the final assessor; I can travel light and be gentle with others even in the face of their harshness (COVID).** We don't have to become like those that hurt us; that just fuels relational isolation. Neither do we need to become hopeless and withdrawn. **Instead we can be God's tool of peace by bringing his light of love, into the darkness of hatred.** We can defeat evil by good (cf. Rom. 12:17-21).

Paul gives a third challenge that will help us access God's peace and joy in Christ. He says that we need to **KEEP LIFTING UP IN PRAYER!** (vv. 6-7). Not only do we need to look up and reach out, but **we need to lift up our burdens to a God who is more than able to handle what we cannot.** In light of who God is we shouldn't be anxious about the **past, present or the future**, but rather through prayer we should present our needs to God **with a thankful heart.** When we worry, we betray our lack of confidence in the reality of God's protection and care in our lives. **The discipline of prayer reveals just the opposite.** In our world people try different things to cope with the stress of life – **distractions, addictive substances, and obsessive behaviours.** We try and numb ourselves to the reality of our pain. God wants us to learn the healthy way to deal with living in **a beautiful but broken world.** He says there is no way that we are going to find peace and joy by turning to **a pill, a bottle, to lust, to abusing people, to consuming stuff, to amusing ourselves, or through religious rituals.** The only way we will be able to handle the overwhelming aspects of this fallen world is by being honest, calling the brokenness for what it is, and then **letting God be God of it. We do that through prayer.**

I think of the prayer of Matthew Henry after he was robbed. He prayed "God, I thank you first because I was never robbed before; second, although they took my wallet they did not take my life; third, because although they took my all it was not much; and fourth, because it was I who was robbed and not I who robbed.

We do that by releasing the cares of this life to God and by acknowledging that we have **no right to a particular mix of circumstances.** We do that by trusting that God is big enough, wise enough and powerful enough to know what we can and cannot handle. Here is the thing: **We have the assurance in prayer that if God does not change our circumstances for His glory and our good; he will change us for His glory and our eternal good, giving us the**

grace to handle what has not changed. And so, we can never go wrong surrendering ourselves in prayer, with gratitude, to the One who is greater than all the brokenness that touches us in this world (sin, problems, stresses, and challenges).

Notice the promise attached to this command (v.7). The promise isn't the disappearance of the struggle, but the reality of **God's presence and peace in it** – a peace and rest that far surpass human understanding. So, we put all our stuff in a garbage bag and lift it up to God in prayer and he in gives us His gift of forever peace, beautifully wrapped. It is a **human/divine exchange (application – visualize)**. Paul says that this peace in Jesus Christ will literally be a wall of protection around our hearts and minds. *Genuine prayer is a supernatural antibody that kills off the disease of fear and worry.* **Illustration - Missionary ship.**

Paul gives us **one final way to deal** with the vulnerability and instability of life. He says we must **KEEP DRINKING IN THE WORD!**

⁸ Finally, brothers and sisters, 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. **Philippians 4:8-9**

The point is that we must focus ourselves on the will of God, the principles and promises of God's Word. Replace our mental intake diet of pop and junk food of the culture with the milk and meat of God's truth. Paul gives a list of virtues that we are to stop and reflect on in our life. His point is to **focus us, not to give us an exhaustive list**. The last two phrases in v.8 point out that Paul wants us to dwell on whatever has moral/spiritual excellence and is pleasing to God. These are the things we should feed our mind on – **God's truth. These things could just as easily be a description of Christ.** So, fixate on the beauty and treasure of Jesus Christ through the Word of God. The goal is not merely right thinking, but life transformation. This thinking process is to lead to changed lives (v. 9). In the end, **if we feed upon and live out** the reality of God's truth, we will possess a deep-seated rest and peace from God. *Many people assume that anxiety is the result of too much thinking, but in reality, it is the result of too little thinking in the right direction.*

Conclusion/Application:

We have all felt overwhelmed at some level by what is going on in our world. We don't know what the future holds! We have all felt the waves of life breaking over our heads and felt the emotions of anxiety and restlessness, even of hopelessness. The way God wants us to deal with this common human experience is very different than the way the world copes. God

wants to give us his deep and abiding peace and joy in Jesus Christ that can't be touched by the ups and downs of this life. **We experience this peace by looking up in faith, reaching out in love, lifting up in prayer, and drinking in the Word.** We are to see, savour and share the presence and power of Jesus Christ (**cf. Phil. 4:13**). We face our problems, acknowledging the pain of a fallen world and give ourselves to God who has given us His BEST, knowing He will give us the rest.

**God is our refuge and strength,
an ever-present help in trouble.
Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way
and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea
Psalm 46:1-2**