

## Prescriptions for Perilous Times

*Philippians 4:4-9*

As we turn to the word of God I would invite you to turn in your Bible to **Philippians 4** for this message entitled, “Prescriptions for Perilous Times.” Our text for this morning is **Philippians 4:4-9**, which contains some of the most familiar commands in the New Testament. We began studying this letter last June, and believe it or not it’s my purpose to complete it two weeks, the Sunday before Resurrection Day. After Resurrection Day Pastor Dave and Pastor Alan will be preaching for the next month, and then we’re going to begin a series called “Behold Your God” where we’ll work through passages throughout Scripture where our God reveals Himself in powerful ways.

When you’re there, follow along as I read **Philippians 4:4-9**. . . .

There are few problems more common among mankind than anxiety. Some say it is *the* most common problem. It’s been said that anxiety is our body’s way of telling us that something isn’t right. In a sin-cursed world where nothing is the way it ought to be, it’s remarkable that we aren’t more anxious than they already are.

Lost sleep, racing thoughts, endless internal “what-if” monologues, high blood pressure, tense muscles, chest pain, and many more are the common symptoms of anxiety, ranging from annoying to debilitating.

The people in Philippi to whom Paul writes are no different than us. They experienced anxiety just like we do. They had conflicts and pressures and dangers and uncertain futures just like us—perhaps even more so since they didn’t have all the conveniences and prosperity that we have today. No doubt, conflicts in the church made some of them hesitate to gather with the other believers because it was unsettling, not uplifting.

Pressures from outside the church made some of them hesitant to identify publicly as believers because of the social consequences. Whether there were problems within

families, the church, or beyond, anxiety is a common experience among believers then and now.

**What anxious people desperately want—what we need—is peace.** Peace is more than harmonious relationships where there are no conflicts; peace is a condition of the soul where there is tranquility, freedom from undue concern, and stability and confidence. This passage says that peace is possible. More than that, not only can we experience peace, but we can enjoy the presence of the very God who is the source of that peace.

**Most of us have heard the instructions in this passage many times before.** Many of you have given counsel to others based on this passage before. Sadly, many today look at this passage and find it cliché, trite, simplistic, unnuanced, and ultimately unhelpful for the problem of anxiety. Yes, there are many professing Christians today who have embraced the world's view of anxiety and anxiety disorders such that they believe the Bible has nothing to contribute to our understanding of and solutions for anxiety.

**But as one pastor put it, “If the Bible isn’t about anxiety, I don’t know what the Bible is about.”** In the context what he meant was not that the Bible’s primary message is about anxiety itself, but rather that the primary message of the Bible is the gospel of peace, namely, that God reconciled mankind to Himself through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And this gospel of peace resolves the greatest fear mankind has—the fear of death. Beyond that, when we receive and believe the message of the gospel, we have access to all that God has revealed in His word that addresses the anxiety-producing problems in life. The Bible does indeed have a lot to say about the causes and cures of anxiety—far more than we have time to study today.

**Now I recognize that anxiety can be a complex experience because maladies in the body can indeed cause or complicate anxiety, so please hear this:** whatever nuances and complicating factors are involved in any individual’s experience of anxiety, none of those things should lead us to set aside God’s word on the matter. Instead, we should start with God’s word and apply God’s word while we address the complicating factors—physiological or otherwise.

Too often people receive a diagnosis from a psychologist and psychiatrist or they diagnose themselves, and then conclude that because a label has been assigned to their trouble, God's word doesn't apply to them. That happens with anxiety, depression, addictions, anger, hyperactivity, and many other challenges and struggles people face. Beloved, whatever else is true or theorized about our problems, God's word still has something to say about our problems. God never promises to remove our troubles, but He does give us the truth and wisdom to know how to glorify Him in the midst of our troubles.

My appeal to all of us is this: as we walk through this passage, don't think that this only applies to small problems. Don't think that this is for the ordinary every-day troubles of life, but if you have big problems or if you've been diagnosed with a disorder this doesn't apply. This passage does not give a simplistic, unsophisticated solution to anxiety. This passage gives us a prescription of how to respond to any trouble in life in a way that results in experiencing God's peace and presence.

In perilous times, we find here five prescriptions we must follow to experience peace. Let me give you the prescriptions up front and then we'll walk through them. **Prescription #1:** Let joy reign in your heart (vs. 4). **Prescription #2:** Let others experience your gentleness (v. 5). **Prescription #3:** Let God take your burdens (v. 6-7). **Prescription #4:** Let truth rule your mind (v. 8). **Prescription #5:** Let truth rule your life (v. 9).

### **Prescription #1: Let joy reign in your heart (vs. 4).**

LOOK at vs. 4 . . .

Throughout this letter we've seen that the theme of Philippians is, "Rejoice! To live is Christ, and to die is gain." And here Paul punctuates that theme by not only repeating the command to rejoice twice, but by expanding the scope of the command to the entire life of the believer. Throughout the letter Paul rejoiced and called upon his readers to rejoice in various circumstances.

But here he says, “Rejoice in the Lord, *always!*” At all times, in all situations, in the morning, at night, throughout the day, in the good times, in the bad times, when you’re happy, when you’re sad, when you’re celebrating, and when you’re grieving. When life is given and when life is taken. When there is abundance and when there is need. When there is justice and when there is injustice. In any and every circumstance, we are to rejoice.

Now it would be a shallow and wrong understanding to think that Paul is saying, “Don’t worry, be happy! Laugh, giggle, celebrate, throw a party all the time. Always enjoy yourself!” That’s *not* what it means to rejoice *in the Lord*.

To understand what it means to “rejoice in the Lord” we must remember our definition of joy which is that joy is the emotion of delight or strength produced by the Holy Spirit when we view the circumstances of life through the lens of God’s word. Our emotions are the reaction of our soul and body when what we think and believe and value and desire meet the circumstances of life. So when we embrace the thoughts, beliefs, values, and desires of God, when we view life through the lens of God’s word, the Spirit will produce a rush of energy that in some situations results in smiles and laughter, and other times that energy empowers us to confidently endure trials and difficulty. Joy is the emotion of delight or strength produced by the Holy Spirit when we view the circumstances of life through the lens of God’s word.

The command to rejoice, then, is not a command to feel a certain way, but to think and respond a certain way. To rejoice is to purposefully change the lens through which we look at life and respond to our circumstances by faith. We must remove the narrow lens of our finite perspective and put in its place the wide-angle lens of God’s transcendent and eternal perspective.

Looking at life through our own lens is like wearing the wrong prescription—it’s going to give you a headache. Putting on the right glasses doesn’t instantly remove the headache, but in time the clarity of your vision will relax the nerves and soon the pain will dissipate.

In the same way, looking at life through the lens of God's word is not a quick fix to anxiety, but it will put us on the path to peace and joy.

**Why is this? Because the ultimate cause of anxiety and other emotional struggles is *not* thinking the way that God would have us to think.** Whatever other factors may be involved and whatever may be making it difficult for us to think rightly, it is wrong thinking that drives undesirable emotions.

**Think about this—is God ever depressed? Is God ever anxious? No—why is that?** Well, because God knows everything—He knows that everything will work out according to His good purpose. He knows that while there is much evil and wickedness in the world, and while suffering is part of His plan, it is all moving toward a glorious future for those who live by faith, and a disastrous end for those who rebel against Him. So God has nothing to worry or be anxious about. He wins! His plans are certain.

**The bad news is that we can't know everything God knows; the good news is we know *that* God knows everything and He is in complete control.** And if God isn't depressed or anxious, then we shouldn't be either. We can trust His knowledge even if we don't have it ourselves. We can trust His sovereign control, even if we've lost control. **Isaiah 26:3-4** says, "The steadfast of mind You will keep in perfect peace, because he trusts in You. Trust in the LORD forever, for in GOD the LORD, we have an everlasting Rock." But there's more good news still. God doesn't leave us completely in the dark, consider how the following passages call us to let joy reign in our hearts by giving us a filter through which to understand our troubles.

**James 1:2-4** says, "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing." We can rejoice in trials because the effect of those trials will be to grow and mature us in Christ.

**1 Peter 1:6-7** says, "In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be

found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” We can rejoice in trials because as we endure them the genuineness of our faith is being tested and strengthened and as a result we will be rewarded when Christ returns.

**Hebrews 10:34** says, “For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted *joyfully* the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one.” These believers associated themselves with the believers in prison, and that resulted in the loss of their property—a trial they joyfully endured because they knew that this world is not their home. They were looking forward to an everlasting and glorious future.

Jesus said in **Matthew 5:11-12**, “Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” We can rejoice when we are mistreated for the sake of Christ because it puts us in a long line of faithful men and women who were treated the same way.

**These truths enable us to rejoice in troubled times.** Though it’s easy to rejoice in good times, often we rejoice in the wrong things. In **Luke 10** Jesus sent out seventy disciples to various cities to proclaim the good news of the kingdom. And they came back rejoicing saying, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name.” They were all excited that God’s power flowed through them to overcome the evil one. But Jesus responded, “Do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven.” His point was that our salvation is a greater reality worthy of celebration than how God chooses to work through us.

**How easy it is for us to take our salvation for granted and look for joy in other things, and then lament if we can’t find something else that excites us.** But beloved, we’ve been saved from the wrath of God! There is no more condemnation for us who are in Christ Jesus! All our sins have been washed away by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ who loved us and gave us life for us!

So no matter what else is going on your life, you can rejoice in the Lord always because you've been set free from the power and penalty of sin, and one day you'll be set free from the presence of sin. You can rejoice because you've been reconciled to God whose endless love and mercy is at work in your life every moment of every day. We have boundless hope and infinite reasons to celebrate the goodness and faithfulness of God.

HB Charles Jr., a pastor in Florida, described worry and anxiety this way: "It forgets the past goodness of God, and questions the faithfulness of God on the basis of things that haven't happened yet." How can one begin to overcome that mindset? By purposefully looking at our triumphs and troubles through the lens of God's word where we will be reminded of His goodness and faithfulness. That's how we rejoice in the Lord always. Let joy reign in your heart.

## **Prescription #2: Let others experience your gentleness (vs. 5).**

LOOK at vs. 5 . . .

At first this might seem to be oddly placed here. If Paul is intent in giving a series of prescriptions of how to navigate the troubles of life, why would he include a command to be gentle with others?

Well, not every translation uses the word gentle here. Other versions translate the word as "reasonableness" or "moderation" or "graciousness." The meaning of this word is not necessarily handling others in a delicate manner, but rather it's a disposition we should have toward others. Listen to this helpful explanation of the Greek word from a theological dictionary:

"Epieikēs, together with its derivatives, was originally an expression for the balanced, intelligent, decent outlook in contrast to licentiousness. Then it was used for a considerate, thoughtful attitude in legal relationships which was prepared to mitigate the rigours of justice, with its laws and claims, in contrast to the attitude which demands that rights, including one's own, should be upheld at all costs. Both concepts are opposed to unbridled anger, harshness, brutality and self-expression. They represent character traits

of the noble-minded, the wise man who remains meek in the face of insults, the judge who is lenient in judgment, and the king who is kind in his rule. Hence they appear often in pictures of the ideal ruler and in eulogies on men in high positions.” (NIDNTT).

There is no more ideal ruler than our Lord Jesus Christ who is gentle and humble in heart. Jesus Himself was meek in the face of insults, and while His judgment is always just, He is gracious toward sinners.

This is the opposite of how our flesh responds in difficult times. We tend to be harsh in our responses, demeaning in our words, malicious in our hearts, and irrational in our thinking. Our tendency is to defend ourselves, shift the blame, and repay evil for evil feeling justified by what’s happened to us. We respond this way to those closest to us and those who we consider to be our enemies. Social media has made every day open season for responding to those we disagree with in unloving and helpful ways. And oh it’s so easy to think and speak in such ways when the other person is anonymous to us, isn’t it?

But here in **Philippians 4:5**, Paul calls us to be like our Savior by being gentle with all men—all people. Those who live in our home and those we can only engage with through words on a screen. How amazing would it be if after a tense conversation the other person walked away saying, “I still disagree with him or her, but wow that was a pleasant conversation.”

In **Ephesians 4:31** we read, “Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.” Rather than letting others experience our wrath and bitterness, we are called to let them experience our gentleness and kindness—because that’s what we’ve experienced from God.

Now, why should we do this? Paul says here at the end of **vs. 5**, “The Lord is near.” Though not grammatically connected to the command to be gentle, it is logically connected in the flow of Paul’s thought. And while it’s possible that Paul means by this



that the Lord's presence is near to us, it's more likely that he refers to the soon return of Christ.

If that's the case, what does the near return of Christ have to do with letting our gentle spirit be known to others? Well let me ask you: if you knew for certain that Christ was coming back tomorrow, how would you treat other people today? It's possible that in saying this Paul has in mind a parable Jesus gave in **Luke 12**. He said, "Who then is the faithful and sensible steward, whom his master will put in charge of his servants, to give them their rations at the proper time? Blessed is that slave whom his master finds so doing when he comes. Truly I say to you that he will put him in charge of all his possessions. But if that slave says in his heart, 'My master will be a long time in coming,' and begins to beat the slaves, both men and women, and to eat and drink and get drunk; the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know, and will cut him in pieces, and assign him a place with the unbelievers. And that slave who knew his master's will and did not get ready or act in accord with his will, will receive many lashes." The main thrust of this parable is a warning: don't let the perception that Christ's return is still far off tempt you to live in sin today. And it's interesting that Jesus particularly emphasizes the way the wicked slave beats his fellow slaves, both men and women.

Life experience tells us that when children are unsupervised for more than a few minutes, the restraints that hold sin back are loosened. Adults are no different. Oh how differently we would speak and act toward one another if we thought Jesus might walk in at any moment. The soon return of Christ should motivate us toward loving one another. In **2 Peter 3** when he writes about the end of the world he says, "Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness. . . . Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless."

Remembering that Christ can come at any moment keeps our sin in check, but it's also a reminder that the judge of all the earth will set all things right. Instead of repaying evil for

evil we can maintain a gentle and kind disposition toward others and do good to them knowing that the Lord will address all sin and wrongs in His way and at His time.

So beloved, let others experience your gentleness.

### **Prescription #3: Let God take your burdens (vs.6-7).**

LOOK at vs. 6-7 . . .

The word “anxious” translates *merimnao* which has both positive and negative meanings. Positively it can mean to care for others or to be rightly concerned. In **1 Corinthians 12:25** Paul speaks about the proper care the members of Christ’s body have for one another. Or here in **Philippians 2:20** Paul says he doesn’t know anyone who has the same concern for the Philippian church as he and Timothy. So there are many situations where there is a godly concern we should have for the welfare of others.

But there is an ungodly concern which we call worry or anxiety, and that’s what Paul calls us to cease here. This anxiety or worry is what we experience when we assume responsibility for things we cannot control. In **Matthew 6** Jesus speaks of worrying about what will happen tomorrow or worrying about our health. Anxiety is the stress we feel in our body when we pull God off the throne of our lives, put ourselves there, and immediately realize we don’t have the knowledge, the resources, or the power to control anything.

And instead of realizing our mistake, jumping off the throne and recognizing that God is in control and working all things together for good, we freeze and we can’t stop thinking about all the ways things can go wrong.

We make endless false prophecies about the future. And instead of recognizing how terrible we are at predicting the future, we just keep on going. This is idolatry—we’re convinced that if we keep praying to ourselves long enough, eventually we’ll be able to find the solution and control the future. The solution is to stop praying to ourselves and start praying to God. We need to get off the throne and let God take His rightful place.

Note how Paul refers in vs. 6 to prayers and supplications. These two words are synonymous and speak of one reality—communicating to God the burdens of our heart. So prayers and supplications speak to the act generally, and then he refers to thanksgiving and requests to speak to the content of our prayer. In total the idea is to take all of what is in our heart and lay it out before the Lord. In fact, instead of saying at the end of vs. 6, “be made known to God” it’s better translated “be made known in the presence of God.” Prayer is how we draw near to the throne of Grace so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need as it says in [Hebrews 4:16](#).

What do you say to God when your world feels like it’s crashing down around you? We’re familiar with the acronym ACTS for prayer—Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication. That is a very helpful way to think about prayer, but it doesn’t cover everything. From the Scripture we can derive other kinds of content that we can and should include when crying out to God in desperate times. Let me give you five other categories that God’s word teaches us. For the sake of time I’m going to fly through these so I’ll give you a brief statement and example passages that you can look up on your own as a model of the idea.

**First, show and tell.** We can tell God what is going on, even showing Him the evidence. An example of this is [2 Kings 19](#) when King Hezekiah took the threatening letter from Rabshakeh and went to the house of the Lord spread it out before the Lord as if to say, “Lord, do you see this? Do you see what they’re saying?” You can also look at [Psalm 64](#) or [Psalm 73](#). **Second, confusion.** You can express your confusion by asking the heart-wrenching questions running through your mind. [Psalm 13](#) is one of many psalms with questions like, “How long, O LORD? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me? . . . How long will my enemy be exalted over me?” **Third, fears.** We can convey our fears and anxieties such as we read in the prayer of [Psalm 38](#). **Fourth, trust.** We can declare our trust in the Lord and affirm to ourselves and to Him that He is faithful and sovereign and powerful and full of steadfast love. Almost every prayer in the Psalms declares some aspect of the character of God in the midst of sorrow and fear that cause the sufferer to trust in the Lord. **Fifth, history.** We can recite for God His past faithfulness and care for us following the example of [Psalm 139](#) or [143](#).

These five categories again are show and tell, confusion, fears, trust, and history. To these we add thanksgiving to God for the endless flow of His grace that sustains our life and the blessings He pours out beyond number such as in **Psalm 107**. No matter how difficult life gets there is always a reason to give thanks for His goodness in the past and present. And finally, we can make requests. We can specifically ask God to act. We can ask according to our will based on our perception, but we must subject our will to His as Jesus did in the garden when He made His request ending with, “Not My will but Yours be done.”

In expressing all that is in our heart and laying it out before the Lord, what we’re doing is we’re letting God take our burdens. Instead of letting our problems terminate with us, we’re handing them over to Him to deal with. We’re acknowledging our complete dependence on Him and affirming that He alone is able to handle it.

When we do this, Paul says in **vs. 7**, the peace of God guards our hearts and minds. This peace surpasses all comprehension or understanding. Meaning, God’s peace is not based on our ability to reason through our troubles and find peace by means of logically untangling all our problems. Rather, God’s peace is available to us even when we can’t comprehend what God is up to. We can’t figure out the solution. We can’t wrap our mind around how things will work out, and yet we can have peace. Why? Because we’ve given up on the lie that it’s our job to control everything and we’ve embraced the truth that God can and will do it.

This peace that surpasses all comprehension will guard our hearts and minds. This to say that God’s peace will steady us—it will prevent our hearts and minds from shaking and trembling at every threat. God’s peace creates a protective layer around our hearts and minds that prevents fears and troubles from piercing through and debilitating us. I remind you of **Isaiah 26:3-4**, “The steadfast of mind You will keep in perfect peace, because he trusts in You. Trust in the LORD forever, for in GOD the LORD, we have an everlasting Rock.”

We've looked at three prescriptions for perilous times. In vs. 4 we saw that we must let joy reign in our hearts. In vs. 5 we saw that we must let others experience our gentleness. Here in vs. 6-7 we saw that we must let God take our burdens. Consider the fourth prescription in vs. 8...

#### **Prescription #4: Let truth rule your mind (v. 8).**

LOOK at vs. 8 . . .

Here Paul makes explicit what he's already been saying—the way to respond to trouble is to fill your mind with things that are true and beneficial. This prescription does not mean to read a verse, sleep on it, and see how you feel in the morning. No, this prescription is more like a five times a day physical therapy exercise aimed at strengthening your heart and mind.

This practice follows the example of the blessed person in Psalm 1 whose, “delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night.” And the result of that meditation is he is like a strong, fruitful tree unwavering in the storm. Dwelling on these things or meditating does not mean that we endlessly read the Bible. It means that we take in some truth, and we chew on it for a while. Then we swallow it and do what we need to do, but then we regurgitate it and chew on it some more. Perhaps we pray about it. We talk to others about it, maybe we journal about it. In various ways we allow the truth to rule our minds by being so occupied by it that we have little room for anxious thoughts.

Notice the kinds of things we should dwell on. Whatever is true—that which corresponds to reality from God's perspective as revealed in God's word. Truths about God, salvation, God's purposes and promises, His plans for the future, as well as the mountain of truth we find in the Scripture.

We should dwell on whatever is honorable. This is closely associated with sacred things—things that are worthy of respect and dignity because they reflect the holiness of God.

These are not base things of the world, but transcendent realities that command worship.

**We should dwell on whatever is right, or righteous.** This can also mean just—that which aligns with justice and equity. Jesus said in **John 7**, “Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.” Rather than filling our minds with superficial judgments, we should consider God’s way of assessing a situation.

**We should dwell on whatever is pure.** Things that are pure are free from sin, they are unstained by the world, morally upright. Rather than filling our minds with sin-saturated content where sin is normalized and glorified, we should dwell on things that normalize God’s standards of truth and justice and morality.

**We should dwell on whatever is lovely.** This means that which is endearing or agreeable or pleasing. These are things that are attractive and not repulsive. When you speak of them they draw people in and don’t push them away.

**We should dwell on whatever is of good repute.** These are things that others consider praiseworthy and commendable. When others hear about these things, they affirm that they are true and beneficial.

**After listing these six qualities Paul gives two broad filters that encompass any and all other thoughts.** Notice there in the middle of **vs. 8**, “if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise.” The word excellence speaks of moral virtues that reflect God’s character such as mercy and grace and kindness and love and so on. And anything worthy of praise refers to anything that would receive God’s stamp approval and which others would praise and celebrate as well.

These qualities are a filter you place around your mind to determine what thoughts and ideas should take up residence in your daily life, and what thoughts and ideas should be evicted from your mind.

**Is your mind troubled and filled with worry?** Make a list of all kinds of things that fall under one or more of these characteristics. Think about those things, read about those things, listen to teaching and talk with others about those things. Fill your mind with truth and let that rule your mind.

Finally, consider the fifth prescription in **vs. 9** . . .

### **Prescription #5: Let truth rule your life (v. 9).**

LOOK at **vs. 9** . . .

The things they've learned, received, heard, and seen encompasses all the truth that has come to them in all its forms. They've learned truth from their own study. They've received truth handed down from their parents and others. They've heard truth from Paul and their pastors and teachers, and they've seen the truth lived out through Paul as well as the example of others. They've been exposed to the truth, they know the truth, and they've seen models of what it looks like to live according to truth.

Remember back in **3:17** Paul said, "Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us." So here he says the same thing—take what you know and what you've observed and put it into practice.

**How you live reveals what you really believe.** We may say we believe God is in control and He is good in all that He does. But often we respond to trials as if God has lost control and His character is suspect. We may say that to live is Christ and to die is gain, but often our actions teach that to live is gain and to die is loss.

**So we cannot content ourselves with just setting our mind on truth, we have to live according to the truth.** Practicing these things, living according to the truth, is how you know you really believe the truth.

**James 2:14** says, "What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him?" In that context he doesn't mean we are saved by works,

but rather that saving faith is validated by works. As it's been said, we are saved by faith alone, but not by faith that is alone. So earlier in **James 1** he writes, "But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves." Don't be deluded into thinking that hearing the word of God is sufficient. Don't think that just being taught truth and wisdom is what brings change.

Too often people think or even say, "I tried church, I tried counseling, I tried therapy—nothing worked." When the reality is *they* didn't work. They didn't put the truth into practice. They thought they could sit passively as truth entered their ears and then go on making the same choices they've always made and somehow things would change. No, what brings change in your life and what brings peace in your soul and what draws you closer to God is daily living out the truths you learn and receive and hear and observe.

## Conclusion

The result of letting the truth rule our lives is there at the end of **vs. 9**. . . .

Notice, in **vs. 7** we are told the *peace of God will guard our hearts and minds*. Here, it's the *God of peace* who will be with us. Now we know that God is always with us. **Psalm 139** reminds us He is personally present with us everywhere we are. One of the greatest promises in the Bible is that Jesus will never leave us or forsake us. He said, "I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

So what does Paul mean here by saying that the *God of peace will be with us if we practice these things*? This reflects the reality that while God is always with us, there are many times when we don't sense His presence. When our minds are not filled with truth and when our lives are unfaithful to the truth, or when our vision is clouded by the troubles of life, we don't feel the nearness of God. But when do set our minds on things above and when with the Spirit's help we walk by faith and live in accordance to truth, we have a greater sense of God's presence—especially in troubled times.

In **Psalm 23** David says, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me." There is



nothing more frightening or distressing or anxiety-producing than the valley of the shadow of death. But even in that dark valley, fear is swept away by the knowledge of God's presence and care.

**Beloved, we live in a perilous world.** The curse of sin has permeated every sphere of life. Job and his friends didn't agree on very much, but they did agree on one thing. Eliphaz said, "Man is born for trouble, as sparks fly upward." And Job said, "Man, who is born of woman, is short-lived and full of turmoil." Whatever steps we can and should take to mitigate the physical, social, relational, and spiritual dangers around us, we can't stop trouble from breaking in and entering our lives uninvited.

**So what do we do when that happens?** Well there's a lot we can do, but here are five things we *must* do: **Let joy reign** in your heart, **let others experience** your gentleness, **let God take** your burdens, **let the truth rule** your mind, and **let the truth rule** your life. These biblical prescriptions for perilous times will produce God's peace in our lives.