

**Anglican Church Noosa**  
**November 15, 2020**  
**Philippians 4:2-9 - Gospel Call to Joy**

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**JOY in Unity**

Today there's a lot of emphasis on the individual. We can find literally hundreds of books in the self-help section of any bookshop. Most of these books are targeted to individual needs. To reach our greatest potential. And that's because most of us think in terms of our individual needs.

As a society it's abundantly clear that we value individuality.

Now, there is nothing wrong with this per se, unless we emphasise individuality at the expense of community, at the expense of relationship. And I think generally, in the world today, that's what we're doing.

The apostle Paul had a single purpose in life. It was to share the gospel of Jesus Christ and to see people come to know him. And as he did that, he established churches. Now he didn't do that because he dreamed it up. He did it because it was Jesus' idea.

In other words, God knew that we could not do this alone. He knew that we needed one another. Christianity is a group thing. That's why we must learn how to live together in such a way that we can be effective.

There was a situation in the church at Philippi where there was some conflict. Euodia and Syntyche were two women in the church who had worked with Paul. We don't know very much about them, we don't even know what the conflict was over. All we know is that they weren't in agreement and were having problems.

If we are going to be effective in the church, we need unity. We must share a common vision. And to do that we all need to be prepared to give of ourselves.

To give ourselves away, basically, for the sake of the vision that God is giving us.

God's will, must become our will, not the other way around. Often, we pray and tell God what we want and ask him to bless it.

In other words, we ask God to make our will his will.

Instead, we need to discover his will and adopt that as our will. Now what do you think will happen if we ALL do that?

Well, if we all do that, then we will be able to walk together in unity. Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven!!

Unity comes around shared vision.

For Christians, unity comes around shared gospel vision. You see, our unity in the gospel is a given.

We are ONE in Christ Jesus. That's a declaration. What we need to do is to maintain that oneness, maintain that unity. And when we do that we will be a testimony to the world that Jesus makes a difference in the lives of those who follow him.

Because, let me tell you, unity in the world is a very rare thing. You've only got to look at any political party and you'll see that. Unity is rare.

Paul says: I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord.

Now it's possible that Euodia and Syntyche could have been leaders in the Philippian church, and if so, their lack of unity could have caused more damage than it otherwise might. Paul describes them as being among his co-workers, and calls on another companion there to help them make things right.

Today we didn't read v.1 of chapter 4 ..... that was included in last week's passage. But I take you back to v.1 where Paul describes his brothers and sisters in Philippi as "his joy and crown", and calls on them to stand firm. Then he immediately goes on to this reprimand of these two women.

Probably because the disunity between them detracts from the joy that Paul receives from these friends. Their names are in the book of life .... they are loved and redeemed by the Saviour ..... they have worked side by side for the Gospel, and for the sake of Paul's joy and their own joy, they need to be reconciled.

It is very hard to find joy in your discipleship, if you are at odds with companions.

Can I encourage you today, that if you are experiencing a broken relationship with a brother or sister in Christ, or if you are just struggling with someone you find difficult, why don't YOU be the one who makes the first move. Put aside your own peccadilloes and sensitivities, remember that, above all else, your name is in the book of life, if indeed you have given your will over to God's will, and return that relationship into one of love and unity.

If you do that, I can assure you that "joy" can once again be a characteristic of your life.

These next 4 verses are so familiar, and so challenging.

Phil 4:4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! <sup>5</sup> Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. <sup>6</sup> Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

## JOY in Anxiety

This whole theme of joy has already been introduced by Paul several times.

In chapter 1 – I pray with joy.

Chapter 2 – if he is to be a sacrifice for them, he will rejoice in that.

Chapter 3 – so, brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord.

And now chapter 4 – rejoice in the Lord always

And in this instance, he is emphatic.

Rejoice in the Lord always. I'll say it again ... rejoice!!

Now remember, he's writing this from prison. He's not saying, 'let's just stick out this tough life as best we can, you've got it tough, I've got it tough, we've just gotta make do.', no way ... he's saying 'rejoice' in it.

Now, how on earth can we rejoice always??

Well, thank goodness Paul gives us the answer.

We can rejoice always ..... in the Lord.

It's not something we do. It's what Jesus does through us.

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I want to do a little excursus into the Gk word for rejoice which is 'chairō'.

It's used in a variety of ways -

- often the formal beginning of a letter

- a formal greeting when you met someone in public

- but it was also used as an expression of wellbeing, an expression of gladness.

Now that idea of wellbeing is a beautiful way to describe and understand JOY.

In Acts 8, when the good news is preached and received, those who believed were filled with 'chairō'. The same word was used to describe the prodigal son's father when the son returned.

It's also used though, as an expression of the ultimate response of worship, the attitude that comes with praise. And it's used to describe what will happen because your name is written in heaven, and you will be at the marriage feast of the Lamb described in Revelation.  
All that is wrapped up in that little word 'rejoice' or be joyful.

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How many of us are immune to stress?  
How many of us are immune to worry?

Stress has become a way of life. We live in a world of stressed out people.  
There is truth that we need some stress to be able to function at our best.  
But some people claim that they need high levels of stress to push them to excellence. But they are still stressed out.

We live in an age of anxiety.  
Today we talk about burnout like no other time in history. There are more emotional disorders as a result of stress and anxiety than ever before.

What can we do about it? Can we rise above the pressures of life?  
Does Jesus make a difference?

Most Christians would say that he does.  
Well, if he does, what difference is he making in your life? Are you being different, living differently, through Christ being in your life?

Does Jesus make a difference in how you handle the pressure and stresses of life?  
Because Paul is saying here - do not be anxious!  
God wants us to be full of joy!

Not everyone believes this. In fact, some people view God as a killjoy. They see him as a crotchety old man waiting for us to make a mistake so he can smack our hand. They see God as someone trying to keep us from having any fun.

Now we all have anxieties.  
We worry about so many things. We worry about jobs; money; our marriages; children.  
We worry about the past, the present; we worry about the future.  
We worry about paying the bills.  
We worry about investments; we worry about retirement. We worry about our health.  
We worry about our relationship with God.

But what good does worry actually do?  
The simple answer is none — none whatsoever.  
The truth is that you generally can't change what you worry about, so all your worry is wasted.  
All that energy. For nothing! Stop it!

Do you remember what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount? We heard it a little earlier ...  
Therefore I tell you, don't worry about everyday life — whether you have enough food, drink, and clothes. Doesn't life consist of more than food and clothing? (Matthew 6:25 NLT)

The real antidote to worry is simple trust in God.

Now please don't hear me saying that for people who suffer from clinical conditions, either depression or other mental illnesses, should simply just put their trust in God and stop worrying. It would be a very foolish thing for me to say that, and extremely unhelpful. Please, can I encourage you that if you have, or

think you might have, a condition then please seek medical intervention, and don't ever feel that is a sign of lack of faith to do so. In fact, it's the opposite. It's a sign of courage, and of trust in God that he will lead you to the help you need.

What I do want to say to everyone, is that God loves us and he's in control, and he wants the best for us. You can trust him with your life, you can trust him with your fears. For those of us who are just plain old worriers. Trust God instead!

Now by this, I don't mean that when we have faith in God, bad things don't happen. But, what I do mean is that when we allow our faith in God, to rule our thinking.... our responses to the bad things of life can be different.

Paul wrote this letter from jail. Life for Paul was pretty much as bad as it could get. Yet he was able to write this letter, saying these sorts of things, to the people he loved.

The message is simple — Replace worry with prayer. Pray so much that worry has to stand in line.

Ok, let's move on to the next few verses.

It's actually beautiful, because Paul has told us to not worry, but to pray, and then, he's so practical, because he tells us what to fill our minds with. He tells us how should we think ...

Phil 4:8 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. <sup>9</sup> 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.

At first glance, he seems to be the Norman Vincent Peale of two millennia ago, encouraging us to think positively.

Now that is true, but I think he's doing more than that.

I believe he is encouraging us, as Christians, to think in a distinctively Christian way.

And the reason why he is doing this is because our thinking matters.

Thinking shapes our life. We need to understand the importance of how we think, as we try to live in a distinctively Christian way.

What we think, matters.

Health professionals will tell us just how powerful our mind is. In fact, our mental condition can affect our physical condition. And this has been known for millennia. Proverbs 17:22 says "A cheerful heart is a good medicine, but a downcast spirit dries up the bones."

Our thoughts shape our lives. What we believe determines how we behave. How we look at the world and think about the world determines how we respond to circumstances and to people.

In other words, what we focus on, what we think on, determines how we live.

Listen again to the things he mentions. Things that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, and praiseworthy. He is asking us to reject thinking that is impure and unrighteous—thinking that is ungodly. And he's saying embrace a new kind of thinking—thinking that is righteous and holy and positive.

Christian thinking, you see, is full of hope and full of faith, not full of worry.

Thinking and living, go hand in hand. We will never live right until we think right. And living right will encourage us to think right.

And so I believe we need to be careful about what goes into our minds, what we see with our eyes, and what we do with our bodies.

Because all these things affect our thinking.

What do we watch on TV?

What movies do we choose to look at?

What books do we read?

What magazines do we buy?

What websites do we go to?

Do they pass the true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent and praiseworthy test?

Now I want to put in a little proviso here.

Please don't hear me saying that we must pull out of the world.

We need to engage with the world, to know what is happening in the world, to know what people are watching and reading, but we do that in order to better know the world so we can present Jesus in a way that is going to communicate effectively.

So my friends, 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.