

# Joyful Peace

Philippians 4:1-9

One week after the most deadly church shooting in American history our hearts go out to these brothers and sisters grieving a terrible loss and we continue to pray for them, for their church and their community. ***May the God of all comfort strengthen and uphold each one.*** May all of the believers look to the Lord in faith and cling to Him in their struggles and pain; may none turn away from Him, looking for comfort in other things. May the church be united and strengthened through this as they become family for each other – supporting those whose hearts are broken. And may the community be touched by the faith and love they see in these dear believers. May the Lord use this to draw people to Jesus as their only hope and their ultimate security.

Please be assured that we have a Safety Plan already coming into effect. One of our members attended a conference on church safety just last month and we are beginning to implement some of the key principles and best practices we have learned. Pay attention, especially parents and older siblings – some doors you used to use are now locked to ensure only one secure entrance into Treehouse.

Of course we know our security ultimately rests not with any plan or measures we put in place but in the loving, sovereign care of our Heavenly Father. May we rest in His goodness as our Almighty Shepherd. May we turn our worries into prayers.

And if we pray instead of worrying, listen again to the promise from verse seven – our memory verse for this month – ***“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”***

What a wonderful promise! **If we turn our worries into prayers, God will turn them into PEACE.**

The shalom of God – His all-powerful, sovereign security that invites us into the Sabbath rest of the people of God – is promised to us IF we will just pray. And then two verses later in v. 9 ***“Practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.”***

Not only will God’s peace guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus but God Himself – who is the God of peace – will be with us. And if God is with us, how can we NOT have peace?

- The One who promised Joshua “I will never leave you nor forsake you,” and on the basis of His presence said, “Be strong and courageous!”
- The One who was a shepherd to David the shepherd, moving the young King to say, “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil, for you are with me...”
- The One who sent his disciples to make disciples of all nations went on to say, “Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

**The peace of God will guard our hearts because the God of peace is with us!**

This morning we’ll see two exhortations to peace in Philippians 4 – first a challenge to be at peace with one another in the church and secondly a charge to cultivate a life of peace with God.

The first part will help us work through issues of conflict and division in the church, in pursuit of peace and harmony in our relationships with each other. The second part will help us work through issues of stress and anxiety in our hearts, in pursuit of peace and security in our relationship with God.

### **Peace with One Another**

Listen to the appeal from Paul in v. 2 – a very personal appeal: ***“I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord.”*** This whole sentence is overkill. There is no grammatical need to repeat the verb when he could have simply said, “I plead with Euodia and Syntyche.” But no, it’s like he wants to treat them exactly evenly and appeal directly to each of them in turn. You wouldn’t think it was necessary to call them out by name, in a book that only names Paul and Timothy – the authors of the letter – and Epaphroditus, the carrier of the letter. But Paul feels this issue is so important that he must address it directly and he must call out these two women by name.

Aren’t you just dying to know what they were fighting over? It couldn’t have been doctrine – at least not major doctrine – or Paul would have clarified the truth and corrected the one in error. So it must have been a relational conflict over some other matter. Since Paul goes on to affirm these two for their labor with him in gospel ministry it is likely that they were with Lydia by the river as part of the first group of praying women who welcomed Paul to Philippi and around which he built the new church in the first place – so these are not brand new believers.

We don’t know what the issue was but we know that their disagreement was strong and that it had lasted long enough that they were not going to resolve it without help – so Paul adds an exhortation to the “true companion” or “loyal yokefellow” to help them work things out. As Jesus taught in the beatitudes – “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.” We reflect our Father best when we mirror His commitment to peace and reconciliation.

Paul shows us here **five reasons to pursue peace and unity in the church.**

First, **as members of God’s family** we are called to peace. V. 1 ***“Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.”*** Is that enough warm fuzzy language for you?

I went on a youth retreat one time where everyone wore these puffy yarn ball things around our necks and if someone said something nice to you they would pull a little strand of yarn from their ball and tie it around your yarn necklace. They gave you a ***“warm fuzzy”*** – literally and emotionally. Now, if you said something unkind to someone that was called a “cold prickly” and you had to immediately make it up by saying you’re sorry and giving them three warm fuzzies.

This is one of those cases where everything I needed to know in life I learned in Kindergarten, right? “If you can’t say something nice...” “Use build ups not tear downs.” “Give people warm fuzzies not cold pricklies.” And if you do give a cold prickly, be quick to apologize and follow up with three warm fuzzies. Wouldn’t our relationships both in church, in our homes, at school and at work all be better if we followed this simple rule? Or as the dog lovers say, “Wag more, bark less.”

Listen to the warm fuzzies in v. 1 ***“my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown... my beloved.”*** That is six warm fuzzies in one sentence that only includes 21 words! Think how our conversations and relationships would improve if we included a warm fuzzy in every fourth or fifth word!

Paul’s point is – **I am committed to our relationship.** I’ve got a hard word for you in the next verse, but hear it from a brother who loves you and longs to be with you. This IS an intervention from 800 miles away, but Paul still communicates that these believers – including Euodia and Syntyche are his joy and crown. These believers are the work Paul has devoted his life to – they are the precious jewels he wants to present to the Lord Jesus with their full radiance untarnished by grumbling or disputing and unstained by division and unresolved conflict.

Since **we are family**, brothers and sisters, let’s live like family. Let’s live at peace with one another, working humbly and graciously to resolve issues early before they become big issues. And if they do become big issues let’s have the humility to enlist the help of others as Paul does in verse 3.

The second reason to pursue peace is that **we are servants of Jesus Christ.** Paul exhorts the two women “to agree **in the Lord.**” He is not saying, “agree on every point,” or “agree to disagree.” He is saying agree with one another that your primary allegiance is to Jesus, so you are committed to the relationship and will work to be reconciled.

I worked with a couple for a full year, trying to help them bring healing to longstanding conflict in their marriage. I had them each read the book *The Calvary Road*, which is all about coming to Jesus humble and broken, confessing your sins and seeking forgiveness and life in Him. Then I asked them each to write out affirmations of value to the other person and confessions of their own sin. To hear them read these documents to each other was very moving and I thought they had taken a big step toward healing.

HOWEVER, they both got hung up on ***one or two things the other person DID NOT apologize for*** and their conflict took another turn on what Emerson Eggerichs calls the Crazy Cycle in his helpful book *Love and Respect*. This couple refused to agree in the Lord, and like so many today, two otherwise committed Christians ended up getting a divorce. They had become professionals at the blame game, fixating on the speck of dust in the other’s eye and completely ignoring the 2x4 in their own eye and utterly dishonoring the God of peace they both claimed to love, worship and obey.

Friends here today, ***if your marriage is in trouble***, please call me or Pastor Dave today. Don’t wait until tomorrow. Don’t put off that visit to the counseling center. ***The cancer of disunity must be treated early and aggressively.*** And as servants of Jesus Christ we are called to peace. I entreat you as Paul does to agree in the Lord.

The third reason to pursue peace in the church is that **we are fellow workers in the gospel.** The church is like a racehorse that God designed to run. We are supposed to be riders in the Pony Express, bringing the best news in all of history to people in need of hope and to places that are lost in darkness, undaunted by “snow or rain or heat or gloom of night in the completion of our appointed rounds.” As the early ads for Pony Express riders clearly stated, you had to be young, wiry and willing to risk death daily. Therefore orphans were preferred. Those riders were brave

and they embraced their mission to get the mail through. So are we still today called to carry the message forward, letting nothing get in our way or slow us down. ***Let's cast aside every hindrance so we can run ahead with the message!***

Hear these words from Paul in verse 3, ***“Yes, I ask you also, true companion – help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.”***

All of us are called to be peacemakers – to help each other agree in the Lord; to recognize that having our names written in the Lamb's book of life has infinite, eternal value and winning an argument or protecting your pride has no value. Running forward with the gospel is our mission and anything that hinders that must be resolved so we can resume our task – so the horse can run!

The fourth reason to pursue unity and peace in the church is in verse 4 where Paul states again the central command of the book: “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.” **As Worshipers of Christ we are called to peace.** How are we to stand firm in the Lord? By casting aside every hindrance and running the race of faith marked out for us; by fixing our hearts and minds and lives on Jesus Christ and making Him our joy, our hope, our glory and our boast. The more we lift Jesus up in our hearts and in our church the more we will see our petty disagreements for the trite and insignificant things they are. ***What we share in Christ infinitely outweighs any differences of opinion we might have.*** Agree in the Lord!

Did you know that the most common reason that missionaries return from the mission field is not lack of funding or discouragement due to lack of response or personal health or other difficulties or even persecution and fierce opposition. The most common reason missionaries quit and come home is unresolved CONFLICT on their team – ***conflict with other MISSIONARIES.*** [<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-number-one-reason-missionaries-go-home/>]

What did Jesus pray for in John 17? What was the burden on his heart as he prepared to give his life for us? The UNITY of the family he was founding. He prayed, that they ***“may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.”*** John 17:21

Our calling is to rejoice in the Lord – to glory in Him – to be so focused on HIM and the grace He has given us that we overflow with grace to those around us. I think the reason there is so much conflict in marriage, on missions teams and even in the church is that we are often running on empty when it comes to joy in the Lord. And if I am empty, what do I have to give you – especially if I feel that you are a drain to me? Only if I am full of the Holy Spirit do I have His resources to spill out on others.

The fifth reason we are called to peace is because Jesus is coming soon. **As Stewards of the King, we are called to peace.** Verse five: ***“Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand.”*** That word “reasonableness” is probably translated differently in every translation in this room: moderation, forbearance, graciousness, gentleness, kindness, modesty, patience, consideration, unselfishness. MacArthur sums it up as “humble graciousness.”

Knowing that our Lord and Master is coming back soon – that He is at hand, right at the door – should have dramatic implications for how we treat every minute of our lives. We are stewards, not owners. Everything we have has been entrusted to us for a time and when the Master returns we will give an account to him of how we have used our time, talent, treasure, gifts, energy, family, vocation, resources, relationships... everything. ***We are managers – not owners- of everything God has entrusted to us, especially our relationships.*** So let's treat those relationships as the precious gifts they are and, "to the extent that it depends on you, live at peace with all people."

It's just like we tell our teenagers – would be you doing that if Mom was here? Turn around, she's right there in the doorway. Paul uses the same reasoning here with Jesus. Would you let conflict go unresolved if Jesus were standing in the room? Lift your heads, his hand is on the doorknob of heaven and all he's waiting for is the nod from the Father and he will be coming for us.

We will talk in a moment about discipline. But right now we are still talking about peace and unity in the church and Paul has fired five rounds, one after another, appealing, exhorting, inspiring and motivating the believers to AGREE, to live in unity, to be humble and gentle and understanding and sensitive and gracious to one another.

Brothers and sisters, we are called to peace and unity with one another. We are family. We are servants of Christ Jesus. We are fellow workers in the gospel. We glory in Christ Jesus. And we await our King's soon return. So let's resolve issues when they arise – let's let grace and love cover a multitude of sins. Let's not let the sun go down on our anger. Let's remember Philippians 1:27, ***"Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel."*** Philippians 1:27

We are called to live at peace with one another and twice in these next few verses we are promised the very peace of God. In days of gathering fear and darkness, in times of stress and worry, we need the clear teaching of Scripture as we have it here in Philippians 4:6-9, as God calls us to discipline in prayer, thought and action. These are three steps to peace; three keys to replacing anxiety with the covering, calm assurance that God is with you – that He has you. Be disciplined in prayer, in thought and in action.

First, our calling to be disciplined in grateful prayer. Vv. 6-7 ***"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."*** Philippians 4:6-7

You probably know that the most frequently stated command in all of Scripture is not to worship God or to love God or to serve others. The most commonly stated, the most repeated direction and command in Scripture is: **"Do not be afraid."** Depending on what phrasing you go with, there are at least 70 and thematically speaking over 300 times believers are commanded to "Fear not." That is five or six times more than we are exhorted to praise God, love God or serve Him.

Why this concentration of commands?

God's commands always anticipate our needs. He knows that people will struggle with fear and that this is the rub when it comes to knowing, trusting, loving and obeying Him. Will fear control us or will our faith help us turn our fears over to the God who is with us?

Let's be clear. Since we are so often and so strongly COMMANDED not to be afraid and not to worry, we are disobeying God when we do worry and we do give in to fear, which means that **to dwell on our worries is a sin**. Notice the emphasis there – to DWELL on our worries is the sin. We all struggle with temptation and the devil has a customized plan of attack for each of us. Some struggle with one kind of weakness and sinful desire, others with another.

But let's not deceive ourselves to think that worry is an acceptable sin. "I'm just a worrier." You might as well say, "I'm just an unregenerate sinner" and think of yourself as you would an unrepentant drug dealer. "It's not my fault. I was raised by drug dealers. I've always been a drug dealer as long as I can remember. I'll probably always be a drug dealer." Hopefully none of us would nod along with someone, but we would attempt an Obiwan "You don't want to sell me deathsticks. You want to go home and rethink your life."

But don't we do this very thing with worry? "It's not my fault. I was raised by worriers. I've always been a worrier as long as I can remember. I'll probably always be a worrier." NO! That is conceding the war to the enemy. That is dishonoring the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ who died to pay for your sins – like worrying. It is denying the power of the victory of Christ who rose from the dead to set you free from your sins, like worrying!

Here is the trade. We bring God our worries in prayer. He gives us His peace. If we turn our worries into prayer, God promises to turn them into peace. Let the impact of this Scripture sink in. "DO NOT BE anxious about ANYTHING, but in EVERYTHING, by prayer and supplication WITH THANKSGIVING let your requests be made known to God."

This is very clear instruction. Not ambiguous at all. Don't worry or stress out about ANYTHING. Jesus listed things like the food you eat and the clothes you wear. Today he'd probably say, "Don't worry about paying the rent or that other bill on your desk." Be disciplined in prayer. And specifically in GRATEFUL prayer. As we pray, we should follow Paul's example of giving thanks for all God HAS given us, and let our gratitude convey our TRUST – that God knows better than we do; that He can see the big picture and we can't; that He is the parent and we are the kids; that He has been around literally forever and relatively speaking we were all born yesterday.

And if we will turn our worries into prayers, listen to this promise in v. 7 – one of the most encouraging promises in all of Scripture, "**And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.**" The peace that defines who God is – perfectly whole, perfectly balanced, perfectly at rest and content in Himself – that peace that our frail and finite minds cannot begin to comprehend, will be our protection, our fortress, our refuge – it will guard us – IF we simply come to the Lord in prayer.

Now, for our family the last couple of years and the last few months have had our share of things to worry about. We have dealt with serious illness, we have moved four summers in a row and our boys have been in three or four different school settings each, we relocated over 1,000 miles from our previous home and have started in a brand new ministry setting. On top of that our house in Chicago simply would not sell so we've had that little detail weighing on our minds.

So the question for us has not been whether we have had things to worry about. The question has been whether we would dwell on those worries or if we would turn them over to the Lord in prayer. And I can't say that we've been perfect about this – the symptoms of stress and worry are not too hard to find in us – but I wanted to share with you this morning ***how faithful God has been to fulfill this promise to our family.***

Through all of the changes, all of the unknowns, all of the adjustments and pressures, we have felt a surprising peace. Though our lives have often felt way out of our control, our hearts and minds have largely felt protected – guarded by something. And I can assure you that is not our own wisdom or strength or willpower. It is the peace of God.

Oh, and as another testament to God's faithfulness, we signed a contract on our Chicago house last Sunday after church! There are still many steps in the process toward closing, but it looks like the Lord has brought us a well qualified and interested buyer and we are very thankful for the two Christian realtors who are working together to sell our house, plus the dear friends from the church up there who continue to faithfully mow the lawn for us!

Of course we are also thankful for the hundreds of people who have been faithfully joining us in prayer, lifting us up before the Father. We know that much of the peace we feel is the result of the prayers of others, like you. This is part of the gratefulness of prayer.

We are promised the peace of God IF we will turn our worries into prayers; IF we will be disciplined in grateful praying. Secondly, **we must be disciplined in Biblical Thinking.** ***“Finally my 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.”***

How do we know what is true, honorable, just and pure? Only from God's Word. Only by filling our minds with Scripture, memorizing and meditating on Scripture can we obey this instruction. Don't dwell on your worries, temptations or struggles, dwell on God's Word. “Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly.” “Blessed is the one whose delight is in the Law of the Lord on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in season.” (Psalm 1:2-3). “Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” “I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.” “All Scripture is breathed out by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

***Do you want to regularly experience the peace of God?*** Do you want to be mature and complete, equipped for every good work? Then be disciplined in Biblical thinking. Learn to think God's thoughts after Him. Become a student of Scripture and fill your mind with the Word of God.

**Finally be disciplined in Faithful Actions.** ***“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 4:9

It is not enough to pray about things and meditate on God's Word, we must obey the Bible and apply what we learn. What have you learned from those who taught you about Jesus? What have you received and heard from them? What have you seen in them? PRACTICE these things. Be

faithful in DOING them. The wise man who has built his house on the rock is not the one who merely hears the teachings of Jesus but then puts them into practice. In the end it is by our fruit that people know we are followers of Jesus – by the actions our lives produce.

Be encouraged that the final words of this passage are not THEN the God of peace will be with you as if that promise was dependent on our performance. No, it says “AND the God of peace will be with you.” We will only experience the peace of God to the extent that we turn our worries into prayers, dwell on God’s word instead of our issues and apply what we learn. But regardless of what we do, the God of peace will always be with us – for we are His and nothing can change that or add to it.

So brothers and sisters, let’s be people of peace. Let’s pursue peace with one another and peace with God even as we invite those around us to the only One who can truly give them peace.

Let’s pray.