

- *No one is at their best right now, including you, so be gentle to absolutely everyone (4:5).*
- *Christ is near (4:5). Take moments to experience the reality that you are surrounded by transcendent compassion that is larger and deeper than you.*
- *Don't obsess over your worries, but don't brush them under the carpet, either. Share them with God, all the worry and all the gratitude together (4:6).*
- *This conversation with God is a source of peace beyond our capacity to understand (4:7).*
- *Commit yourself not to simply obsess over all that is going wrong, all the evil and destruction you see in the world. Turn your attention to things that really matter, to where you see action that is worthy of respect, to places where justice is being done, to goodness in all its forms. The literal Greek for "think on these things" means: to take an inventory. (Write them down, if need be.)*
- *Pay attention to the truly remarkable people around you who will show you how to walk this path (4:9).^[1]*

Read Philippians 4:10 - 23

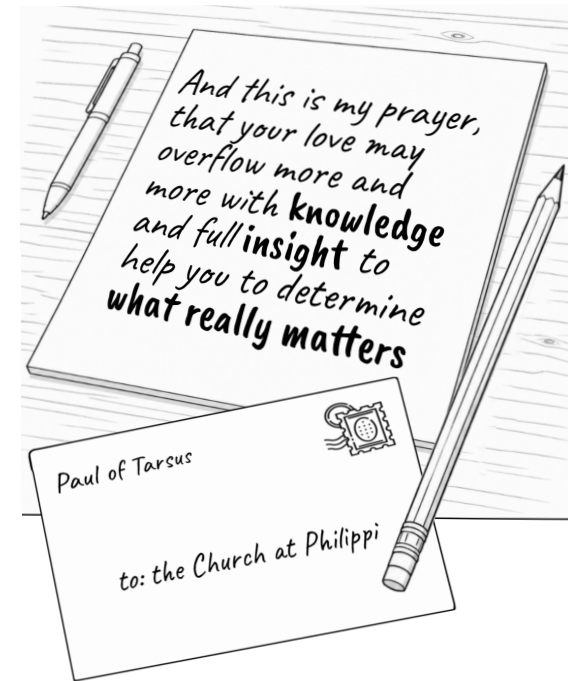
6. Discuss your thoughts concerning vv. 12-13. What "all things" can we do through Christ?
7. In verse 10, discern why God will satisfy the Philippians' needs?
8. What is precious, and gives hope in v. 22.
9. In your own words, what do YOU think really matters according to Paul?

This week's lesson relied heavily on several articles from WorkingPreacher.org. The following women were especially helpful in their perspectives.

[1] Working Preacher, "Philippians 4:1-9;" Oct. 5, 2023. Jane Lancaster Patterson, Professor Emerita of New Testament, Seminary of the Southwest Austin, TX

[2] Working Preacher, "Philippians 3:17-21;" March 16, 2025. Susan Hedahl, Professor Emerita of Homiletics, Lutheran Theological Seminary, Gettysburg, PA.

PAUL'S LETTER to the PHILIPPIANS



Week 5, Philippians 3:17 - 4:23

"No one is at their best right now, including you, so be gentle to absolutely everyone. Christ is near." Philippians 4:5

REVIEW:

"The beautiful, poetic language of Philippians 4:4-9 has become a familiar touchstone for many. But if this passage is separated from the conditions in which the words were first offered as consolation, the meaning can become a shallow assurance of God's answers to prayer. It is important to remember that these words were written by a person chained in a Roman prison, wondering whether he will be sentenced to death for his socially provocative Gospel, writing to a community under related social and economic duress. Both are experiencing extreme pressure to back off from their proclamation of the crucified and risen Messiah. This is the kind of message that inspired Martin Luther King Jr.'s own "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," words written to strengthen a community under siege for their proclamation of God's justice and concern for all people.

In our own time, many people express anxiety about not just their personal well-being, but for large-scale national and global issues. We are confronted with exactly Paul's concern: how to give both hope and practical advice for making it through genuine threats with an underlying foundation of joy, peace, and community, grounded in the power of God to bring fullness of life in all circumstances."^[1]

Read Philippians 3:12-16

1. Paul is referring to life in Christ: life, death, and resurrection. What are Paul's intentions for himself in Christ?
2. The word translated "mature" or "perfect" is *telos* in Greek. It means complete, or whole. What do you make of verse 15. What is Paul saying about disagreements?

Read Philippians 3:17 - 4:1

"It is unclear historically which adversaries Paul was referring to in verses 18 and 19. It could be those who were attempting to force the agenda of Jewish law on Christian believers. It could be those who were preaching a different kind of Gospel from Paul and whose behavior signified their inability to conform their lives to Christ. It could be those people in the Philippians' environment who lived hedonistically and violently.

Whoever they are, Paul is clear about their lifestyle. They 'live as enemies of the cross of Christ...their end is destruction; their god is the belly; and their glory is their shame...their minds are set on earthly things.' It is crucial to note that verses 18 and 19 feature a pattern of life. He asks them to consider two versions of the Christian life: 'join in imitating me...observe those who live according to the example you have in us.'

"Paul is basically laying out two versions of reality and asking the Philippians to choose the one he and other faithful followers are offering.

... in verses 20 and 21. Paul is telling the Philippians they do not, ultimately, belong to the environment in which they live. They live 'elsewhere,' which is to say 'our citizenship is in heaven.' What Paul is underscoring here is that the Philippians need to know which citizens of which realm they are — this answer will determine their choice of behaviors."^[2]

3. What might be the cost for Philippians of living as a citizen of Heaven while under Roman authority?

The Greek is vague in v. 20. It could be translated as: "But our citizenship, or commonwealth, is in God, from whom we expect the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

4. Discuss what these verses might have meant to Philippians living under Roman oppression, AND what these verses might mean to us, living in a corrupt empire. What is their (our) hope?

Read Philippians 4:2-9

"It should be no surprise that a community under as much pressure as the Philippian church would be experiencing fractures in its leadership. No doubt, there were decisions they needed to make together that were confusing and risky. In 4:2, Paul addresses two leaders of the community, Euodia and Syntyche, who appear to be struggling with how to move forward together faithfully; and Paul appeals to other leaders to come beside them in their conflict, reminding everyone of the history of courageous faithfulness of the two women. Paul doesn't tell any of them what to do, he only reminds them of the pattern of 'the mind of the Lord' and trusts them, once again, to 'work out their own salvation with fear and trembling—for it is God who is at work among you' (2:12).^[1]

As with the word "rejoice," the Greek words for work, and struggled, and co-workers are meant to be in community, never individually. Those three words begin with *syn* in the Greek, meaning *together*.

5. Discuss how God's peace is influenced by our attitudes in vv. 4-7, and more in vv 8-9.

Jane Patterson's interpretation of vv. 4-7:

- *Rejoice: Don't just expect joy to arrive on its own, but commit yourself to practices of godly joy every day (4:4).*