

Love Letters

Lesson 14: Philippians 4

Paul closes out his letter to the Philippians with the admonition not to worry about the future, but to pray about all things, to think good thoughts through all circumstances, and God will give peace.

In the practical busyness of everyday life, how is it possible to rejoice always, to never worry, and to keep our minds fixed on good things? Surely, Paul wouldn't be saying the same thing today if he lived in our modern world. But he would—Paul wasn't issuing instructions he had not followed himself; he was the model example of what it meant to trust in Christ in every circumstance. His words then ring just as true today!

Christ must be at the center of the believer's life for there to be experiential joy in the journey. We see in the conclusion of his letter an appeal for three essentials to joy: *maintaining unity*, *choosing the right thoughts*, and *heartfelt giving*—all of which, when present, will result in God's blessing.

Read Philippians 4:1–23.

Day One:

Joy in Our Attitude

The word *therefore* in verse 1, introduces Paul's last exhortation in the letter, which is to apply what he has written in chapter 3: keep pressing towards the goal of the upward call of God in Christ, remembering that your citizenship is in heaven.

1. How does the apostle describe his affection for these believers (verse 1)? What does he exhort them to do?
2. Next Paul singles out two women whose disagreement was causing discord in the body. Who are they and what does he implore them to do (verse 2)?

The word *implore* in this verse means to beg urgently or earnestly. It is a serious request to solve an earnest problem. It's interesting to note the definition of each woman's name: Euodia means *prosperous journey*, and Syntyche means *pleasant acquaintance*. Since both of these women worked alongside Paul in the ministry, it is apparent they were not living up to the definitions of their names. Paul pleads with them for contentment rather than contention in their relationship because the effects of their disagreement had a rippling effect on many others.

- a. Who does Paul call upon to help these women solve their issues (verse 3)? What does this tell you about the importance of the body of believers working together to maintain unity?

Paul's remedy for contention and division (verse 4): "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!" He goes on to mention an outward manifestation of rejoicing coupled with an inward state of mind necessary to maintain joy at all times.

3. What does he say about these?
 - a. Outward manifestation toward others (verse 5):

 - b. Inward state of mind (verse 6):

Joy is an inner quality of spirit that may or may not always be evident to others, but *gentleness* is reflected in our treatment of others. When we are gentle and kind, our joy is evident. If at times we are "otherwise minded" (Philippians 3:15), Paul presents us with a sure-fire answer: prayer.

4. What are the specific points that can help us deal with worry (verse 6)? (You're given a clue to help you define each one.)
 - a. Prayer (think about your approach to God)—

 - b. Supplication (specific petition)—

 - c. Thanksgiving (heart attitude)—

 - d. When we follow this simple template, of what does Paul say we are assured (verse 7)?

Memory verse: Philippians 4:6 NLT

Write the verse out below; repeat it each day to commit it to memory.

Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done.

Day Two:

Joy in Our Thoughts

Reread Philippians 4:8–9.

What child of God doesn't want to live life free from worry and anxiety? Who doesn't want to live before God in a way that is praiseworthy? Paul had just made the point (verses 6–7) that if we pray about everything with thanksgiving, letting Him know our requests, then His peace will guard our hearts and minds. The phrase "guard your heart" is a military one meaning to "protect or garrison by guarding." In other words: God's peace watches over you like a garrison of soldiers assigned to protect you.

He further implies in verses 8–9 that right thinking leads to right living. *Finally, brethren, whatever things are true—noble—just—pure—lovely—of good report—meditate on these things.* For the exercise today, instead of defining the words, challenge yourself to write down an example of each (a brief definition as it pertains to the text is given for you to consider).

1. *Whatever things are true* (the opposite of dishonest or untrustworthy):
2. *Whatever things are noble* (dignified; worthy of respect; high opinion):
3. *Whatever things are just* (right—in conformity to God's standard):
4. *Whatever things are pure* (wholesome; uncontaminated; clean):
5. *Whatever things are lovely* (that which promotes peace rather than conflict):
6. *Whatever things are of good report* (admirable—what is positive rather than negative):
7. *If there is anything praiseworthy* (meriting praise; highly commendable):
8. Meditating on these things coupled with following Paul's example of them will result in what for the believer (verse 9)?

Selah ~

The word *meditate* in the Amplified translation means "to think and weigh and take account of these things—fix your mind on them." The thought life is critically important to the Christian but it is not the only thing; right thinking should be followed by right living. Paul could put himself out there as the model to follow because he followed Christ! Paul said: "these do, and the God of peace will be with you." Peace is not the absence of difficulty or trouble; peace is the presence of Christ in the midst of these things. Share what God has taught you from this chapter about joy.

"Most Christians are being crucified on a cross between two thieves: yesterday's regrets and tomorrow's worries." —Warren Wiersbe

Day Three:

Joy in Our Giving

Reread Philippians 4:10–23.

Part of Paul's reason for writing to the church at Philippi was to express his personal thanks for their monetary gift to him (4:18). Epaphroditus was the designated messenger to bring it to Paul. His final greetings to this church also include his fellow saints and co-laborers in the gospel who were with him. Paul now expresses a glad heart because of their love.

1. What life lesson(s) had Paul learned (verses 10–13)?
 - a. Verse 11:
 - b. Verse 12:
 - c. Verse 13:
2. Why does Paul single out this church for special commendation (verses 14–16)?
 - a. Blessed by their gift, what did Paul want for these believers (verse 17)?
3. In addition to meeting his financial need, what did Paul want their gift to reflect (verse 18)?
4. According to what measure would God return the blessing to them (verse 19)?

The Bible repeatedly states that God alone is the Creator of all that exists—it all belongs to Him! “I will not take a bull from your house, nor goats out of your folds. For every best of the forest is Mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills. I know all the birds of the mountains, and the wild beasts of the field are Mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell you; for the world is Mine, and all its fullness” (Psalm 50:9–12 NKJV). Since God is God, He can give to an unlimited number of needs and still have an unlimited supply of resources left. When He gives to His children, He gives out of His infinite riches in glory by Christ; His storehouse cannot be exhausted. He doesn't need extended credit; he owns everything!

Selah ~

God will be faithful to meet your needs (4:19) if you will contribute to meeting the needs of others (4:14–18). Your gesture does not have to be giant in scope; it merely has to be magnanimous, which means “big-hearted,” or acting for a noble purpose (refusing to be petty). Once again, we see the emphasis on putting the needs of others ahead of our own. Is there someone you know right now toward whom you can be big-hearted this week? How will you reach out and respond?

Day Four:

Christ in Me

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me (4:13).

Paul's amazing declaration in verse 13 was not an over-inflated boast of self-sufficiency; it was the testimony of a man who had learned how to handle all of life's situations—the ups and downs—in the power of Christ's strength rather than his own. It was the equivalent of saying, "I am ready for anything and equal to anything through Him" (AMP). The phrase "strengthens me" literally means *to infuse strength into me*. It is only in spiritual union with Christ that we possess strength. He infuses us with His energy, not merely a sense of courage, but a dynamic outflow of spiritual enabling. It is the equivalent of Christ's sufficiency in us.

1. Throughout Paul's life, there is only one person whom he credited with strengthening him; who was it? What did he enable Paul to do? (See 1 Timothy 1:12.)
2. Paul prayed for this same ability for all believers in Ephesians 3:16. Look back at this verse, record what it says, and realize it applies to you.
3. 2 Corinthians 12:9–10 holds the key to secret strength; what is it? Why is it so?

Remember that Christ's strength *in you* is not only sufficient—it is *perfected* in you through your weakness.

Selah ~

Even the Old Testament prophets knew that inner strength resided with God . . .

"Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, neither faints nor is weary. His understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall, but those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint" (Isaiah 40:28–31 NKJV).

The phrase "renew their strength" in the above verse literally means *they shall exchange their strength for His*. Wouldn't you rather stand in the power of *His strength* than your own? Would you take a moment now and prayerfully submit yourself to Him? Tell Him what you need strength for and trust Him by faith to empower you to do it! Please record your thoughts.

*In the day when I cried out to you, You answered me, and made me bold
with strength in my soul. —Psalm 138:3*

Day Five:

In Touch with Jesus ~

This section of the lesson is intended to be a review of what you have learned and what God has spoken to you this week. Go back over your lesson with a marking pen or highlighter and mark those places and points that stand out to you. Use the margins to make personal notations. Be sure to indicate which points or questions you'd like to share with your discussion group.

1. *LISTEN*: In what way did the Lord Jesus meet *you* in His Word this week? Be specific.

2. *LEARN*: How can you apply this understanding to your daily Christian walk?

3. *LIVE*: What step of obedience will you purpose to take in our walk of faith this week?

Prayer Requests ~
