

The Book of Philippians

Lesson 11: Stand Firm; Rejoice and Pray -- Philippians 4:1-7

Some of the most famous words in the New Testament live in this short passage. Rejoice in the Lord always. Do not be anxious about anything. The peace of God that surpasses all understanding. We have heard these verses on coffee mugs and greeting cards until they can lose their edge. But Paul did not write them as soothing sentiments. He wrote them as a prisoner, to a church under pressure, with a real quarrel breaking out between two of its women. These are battlefield words, meant for people who are struggling.

Paul begins by calling the Philippians his joy and crown, and pleading with them to stand firm in the Lord. Then he does something tender and a little startling. He names two women, Euodia and Syntyche, who had labored at his side in the gospel, and he gently begs them to agree in the Lord. He does not take sides. He simply will not let a disagreement between two good workers fester and harm the body, and he asks the whole church to help them be reconciled.

Then come the great commands, and notice they are commands, not suggestions. Rejoice in the Lord always. Let your gentleness be evident to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything. These are not natural reflexes. Our natural reflexes are to grumble, to harden, and to worry ourselves sick. Paul calls us to a different way of being human, one anchored in the nearness of the Lord.

And he gives us the doorway out of anxiety. In everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. Then comes the promise. The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. There is a peace available to us that does not depend on our circumstances changing, a peace that stands guard over the anxious heart like a soldier at a gate. As we study, the question is whether we will keep carrying our worries ourselves, or learn to hand them to God and receive the peace he promises.

Group Discussion: Paul commands, “do not be anxious about anything,” and points to prayer as the way through (4:6). Why do you think we so often carry our worries ourselves instead of bringing them to God?

Personal Reflection: Paul gently urges two women to “agree in the Lord” (4:2). Is there a relationship in your life right now where you need to seek agreement or reconciliation, and what has held you back?

Read Philippians 4:1-7

Study Questions

1. Paul pleads with the Philippians to “stand firm in the Lord” (4:1). What does it mean to stand firm, and why does Paul specify standing firm in the Lord rather than simply being strong in ourselves?
2. Where in your life are you currently wobbling or tempted to give way, in conviction, in obedience, or in hope? What would standing firm in the Lord look like there this week?
3. Paul names Euodia and Syntyche, two fellow workers in conflict, and urges them to “agree in the Lord,” asking others to help them (4:2–3). What does this teach us about how seriously the church should take broken relationships among its members, and about the right way to pursue reconciliation?
4. Think of a strained or broken relationship you have been avoiding. What first step toward agreement in the Lord could you take, and who might help you pursue it?
5. Paul commands, “rejoice in the Lord always,” and adds, “let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand” (4:4–5). How are joy and gentleness connected to the nearness of the Lord, and why does Paul ground both in him?
6. Would the people who deal with you, at home, at work, in traffic, describe you as gentle and reasonable? Where is harshness or rigidity showing up in you, and how might the nearness of the Lord soften it?
7. Paul says, “do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God” (4:6). What does this teach us about the true antidote to anxiety, and why does Paul include thanksgiving in the prescription?
8. What are you most anxious about right now? Be honest, do you tend to pray about it or merely worry about it? What would it look like to actually hand that specific worry to God this week?
9. Paul promises that “the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus” (4:7). What is this peace, how is it different from the peace the world offers, and how does it guard us?
10. Look back over the whole passage. Paul calls you to stand firm, to pursue peace with others, to rejoice, to be gentle, and to trade anxiety for prayer. Name one specific way Jesus is using these verses to form you, whether toward steadfastness, reconciliation, gentleness, or freedom from worry.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Matthew 6:25–34, not being anxious but seeking first the kingdom and trusting the Father’s care; 1 Peter 5:6–7, casting all your anxieties on him because he cares for you; Matthew 5:23–24, leaving your gift to be reconciled with your brother; Isaiah 26:3, perfect peace kept for the one whose mind is stayed on God; Colossians 3:15, letting the peace of Christ rule in your hearts.