

Philippians 4 (Part 1): 1-9 • What we think about, long for and love

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Chapter 4 Philippians, and we're going to read through the first 9 verses.

“Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.

² I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. 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.

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. ⁵ Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; ⁶ 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.

⁸ Finally, 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. ⁹ What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.” (ESV)

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, as always, we come before You with a desire to hear Your voice, but we recognize that it is a spiritual dynamic that we're entering into. Therefore, we need the work of Your Holy Spirit to awaken our hearts, our spiritual eyes and ears.

We thank You, Father God, for giving us the ability to understand and to tune into Your voice. But so many times, Lord, it becomes very clouded by the things of this world, and we're asking You to help us to set those aside here for a bit. As we take time to study Your Word, be with us. We pray, Father, in Jesus' precious name, amen.

As we get into the fourth chapter of Philippians, we're dealing with some really private matters, intimate sorts of things, because these first 9 verses of Philippians chapter 4 deal with our thought life. And that's pretty intimate, you have to admit. I can think something, and you don't even know what I'm thinking. You can't smell it on my breath. It's not going to make me drive erratically—well, not usually. You can't figure it out from a blood test, but yet I can be thinking what I'm thinking nonetheless. And it's really kind of between me and God. It's interesting, isn't it, that the Word of God doesn't just deal with how we act and what we say, but how we also think, what's in our hearts.

And so, Paul begins this passage with some very, very tender words for the Philippians. Some of the most personal words that we frankly find in his epistles. He begins by saying, “*therefore, my brothers, whom I love, whom I long for; (he calls them) my joy (and my) crown, (and then he refers to them at the end of that verse as) my beloved.*” Those are pretty powerful things to say, those “*whom I love.*” The word comes from the idea of agape love, unconditional love.

He says I desire those I long for. He wants to be reunited with these people. He says, you are my joy; literally, you are the source of my gladness. He calls them his crown. We'll talk about that in a little bit. He talks—he calls them again at the very end of that verse 1, again, his beloved. It's, frankly, using the very same word that he used earlier.

And what we see in this—as we see these repeated, sort of, terms that Paul uses—is that these people had really captured his heart. That's—I don't know if it surprises you or not to think of the apostle Paul having been captured in his heart by these people, but it kind of brings up the question in our lives: What has captured our hearts? What is our joy? What has—what do I think about?

Again, Paul refers to them as his crown. Interesting, this word for crown refers to that reward that they would give to the Olympians back in those days. They didn't receive gold, silver, and other kinds of medals for their placing in a race or whatever like that. They received a leafy crown. That was the reward. And so, this word is the word that is given to a runner who has run the race and won. So, he says, you are my reward.

I really find that interesting because I think to myself, are the objects of my love and my longing something that the Lord could reward me for? Or are the objects and longings of my heart something that are just very worldly, very fleshly, very selfish, that sort of thing?

The reason I'm bringing all this up and asking these questions is because it's just too easy for you and I to give our hearts permission to love and long for and think about the things of this world, isn't it? And again, we can look all holy on the outside—I'm carrying my Bible here; see that right there in my Bible—but you don't see what's going on in my heart. You don't see what I'm thinking about, what I'm longing for, what I am desiring above all else. Now, that's what this passage is talking about.

And sometimes, the things that we love can actually be harmful. Let me show you a passage from Proverbs 4:23. I like it in the NIV. It says:

Proverbs 4:23 (NIV)

Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.

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And usually, when you and I read a verse like this, we think about guarding our heart from all of the bad things that might come along: bitterness, anger, jealousy, I could go on. Rarely do we think about guarding our heart from things that we love, or the thing— from things that we might love that are contrary to the will of God. See, because this is something— we don't often think of things that we love as things that could be potentially bad for us. You know what I mean? Because I love it, and if it's love, can it be bad? And the answer to that question is, yeah, it can.

And so, when we see this exhortation in the Word to guard your heart, it takes on kind of a new dimension when we think about those things that we might love and long for that are, in fact, dangerous and things that we need to say no to but we don't usually want to. I usually want to say no to bad things. I don't want to say no to things that I love that are bad. Anyway, pretty important thing— question for us to ask.

But you might be thinking, well, how do you know? How would I know necessarily if something that I'm loving and longing for is bad? Well, I think an easy test is to ask yourself the question: When you are focused on that thing or person, and you are loving and longing for that thing, does it bring you closer to the Lord? Or do you find that it actually distances you from Him, as far as your time with Him, your time in prayer, your time in the Word, stuff like that.

I have noticed in my heart, in my life, the things that God has convicted me of, that I have set my heart on to desire, to long for, that have not been according to

His will, those things push me away from Him. I don't spend as much time during the day thinking of Him or His Word. I think I spend more time thinking about me and what I want, what I long for, and I don't have the usual time that I might otherwise have for the things of the Lord. And the Lord uses that in my life to bring conviction and to bring determination that it's something that I need to get out of my life, or at least to stop thinking about. Oh man, that's hard stuff. Now we're—now God is really meddling in our lives, isn't He? These areas that we secretly long for.

What does your heart think about when it is free to think about whatever it will? Where does it go? Where do your thoughts go? What do they turn to when they are free to turn wherever they will? Those are important questions.

As Paul moves on here in verse 2, he says: *“I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche (the word “entreat” means to ask someone earnestly—he says) to agree in the Lord. (And he goes on to say) ³ Yes, I ask you also, true companion (we don't know to whom he is referring), 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.”*

So, he's talking here—and I find this kind of interesting that Paul would stop addressing the church in a broader, more general sense to pause here and address two women, by name, who apparently were great help to him in some respect related to the work of the gospel, but for some reason or another, are having a hard time walking in agreement. And that happens sometimes. These women were struggling to walk in agreement. So, Paul kind of calls them out right in these verses.

How would you like to have been in the Philippian church and gotten called out by name? And you can assume this letter was read in front of the entire church. So that's—boy, I tell you, that's one way of kind of getting to the root of an issue, isn't it? Just bring it, read it in a letter to the whole church. Yeah, that's not too much fun. But Paul is calling upon some of the believers there in the church to help these two women to walk in agreement because they were obviously clashing.

And we talk about these kinds of clashes from time to time, and we say, why is it some people just can't seem to get along together, and we'll kind of chalk it up to personality differences. Well, I just think we just kind of had a personality clash, or something, as if that kind of just explains everything.

I think often it's because two people have very similar giftings in the Lord, and particularly when they have leadership giftings and they're in the same environment of ministry, neither one of them is necessarily in charge but they're working together. It's not uncommon for things like this to kind of happen because when you have a leadership gift, and you are a strong leader, you tend to have a strong personality. And when you have a strong personality, you tend to have strong opinions. And when two people come together with strong opinions, wham! Right?

A number of years ago, Sue and I took a personality test. I don't recommend them, but we were talking with another Calvary Chapel pastor and his wife, and they were telling us about these personality tests. So, we thought, okay, let's take this test. And so, we did, and we found out that we're identical. We are—this personality test called us both drivers. And I thought, man, that answers a lot of questions, because sometimes when we're in the car, there's only one of us driving, but the other one's a driver still. And the word driver means somebody who gets out and leads, and that's— Sue and I are both leaders, and we're strong leaders, and we have strong personalities, and we have strong opinions, but that can easily give way to stubbornness. Yeah, and when you're stubborn, that's when the flesh enters into the strong leadership gifting, right?

Strong leadership giftings are from the Lord. Stubbornness is from the flesh. And so, you end up having issues that you have to resolve. These women had issues they had to resolve. What's the answer? Well, in marriage, in ministry, in the church, wherever you may be with somebody who you're clashing with, the solution is always love, and I'm not trying to oversimplify it. We are commanded to love one another, and that command to love comes with a description of what that love is supposed to look like.

Let me put it on the screen for you. You guys know this:

1 Corinthians 13:4-5 (ESV)

Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful;

Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. (Look at this:) It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful;

That's the kind of love we're called to show one another in the body of Christ and in the home, even if there may be giftings that are very similar there as well.

Moving on, he says: “*Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.*” And you'll notice he doesn't just say rejoice in the Lord; he says, “*Rejoice in the Lord always.*” And that's kind of the bugaboo of that verse, isn't it? Because most of us can find an opportunity or a time sometime in our day, week, year to rejoice in the Lord. Hey, I just want to rejoice in the Lord today because— and then we'll tell about something good that happened. I just want to rejoice in the Lord, and praise the Lord, and rejoice in Him.

But what about rejoicing in the Lord always when you don't have something to tell about that, maybe, has happened in your life? That's what Paul is saying. “*Rejoice in the Lord always.*” And you think, wow, that's kind of hard, isn't it? Paul isn't telling you and I to rejoice in the tragic, or rejoice in the bad, or rejoice in the bummers. It's not what he's saying because you'll notice he doesn't just say rejoice; he says rejoice in the Lord—and guys, there's always something about the Lord that we can rejoice about, even when you are going through a horrific situation.

Let me show you a great quote that I found from Albert Barnes. This is great. He says:

It is the privilege of Christians to do this, not at certain periods or intervals, but at all times they may rejoice in the character of God, in His promises, and in intimacy with Him. If everything else changes, yet the Lord does not change. If the sources of all worldly joys are dried up, there is not a moment of a Christian's life in which he may not find joy in his God. – Albert Barnes

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Isn't that great? There's always something in the Lord to rejoice about, and I think that quote pretty much says it all. So, if you and I are struggling to rejoice, we may be looking in the wrong place.

Verse 5: “*Let your reasonableness be known to everyone.*” Your Bible may say gentleness if you have a different translation. The Greek word refers to kind of a moderate temperament, how we call people kind of a— we'll say he's kind of just even-keeled when it comes to emotions or something like that. And Paul is basically telling us here when he says, “*let your reasonableness*”—it's actually kind of hard to say— “*be known,*” he's saying, as you deal with people, as you

relate to people—you got to wonder if he's thinking of Iodia and Syntyche here—he's saying, chill, be easy to get along with, be fair, be drama-free, right? And what's the reason that he gives for it? Because, he says, the Lord is at hand. In other words, the return of the Lord is near, and you don't want Him finding you causing trouble.

So, he goes on, verses 6 and 7: “*do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication (which is the act of asking for something) with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*”

I'm willing to bet many of you have committed these two verses to memory. At the very least, you probably wrote them down somewhere or underlined them in your Bible. Very, very wonderful promise. Maybe one of the most wonderful promises in God's Word because it's all about peace and peace is a wonderful thing. But it's not just any peace. You'll notice it's peace, he says, that surpasses all understanding. What does that mean? Well, he's talking about not peace that comes from circumstances but peace that comes from the Lord.

Let me show you how Jesus put it. On the screen from John 14, these are the words of the Lord.

John 14:27 ESV

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.

This is important. This is all about the peace that surpasses understanding. It's not like the peace the world gives. The peace the world gives is based on something good that happened. When two nations decide to stop warring, there's peace. When two people decide to stop being antagonistic to one another and make up, there's peace. When you and I get good news when we were expecting bad news, it gives us peace. But those are peace—those are instances of peace based upon circumstances. Jesus is talking about—and Paul is reiterating here to the Philippians—about peace that is predicated on nothing more than Jesus Christ Himself, and therefore, circumstances have nothing to do with it.

You see— again, there's really nothing wrong with circumstantial peace, I suppose. The problem with it is that another circumstance could arise in the next minute to take your peace away. If my peace is based upon the fact that my outward environment is at peace, that's great for as long as it lasts, but as soon as something invades my environment again that is chaotic or scary, my peace is gone.

And so, Paul talks about peace that surpasses understanding, or it goes beyond understanding because, he says, it is the peace of the Lord, and it can't be stolen because it's not based upon what's happening here (indicating environment). It's what's happening here (indicating heart) because it is peace from Him. It is not predicated on natural circumstances; it is based in supernatural circumstances, and it comes from the Lord.

I don't know if you've ever experienced it. I haven't experienced it nearly enough; I'll say that. But I have experienced it at times, and it's weird. That's my expert observation. It's weird. It really is. It's strange because when Paul says it surpasses understanding, that means you can't really understand why you feel at peace.

You're in the midst of a situation for which you should be freaking out, and you're not. This news comes, or situation comes into your environment that is chaotic and upsetting and scary and frightful, and for some reason, you're sitting there, cool as a cucumber, and you're like, I shouldn't. And people around you are like, they come to minister to you, and you're like, I'm good. And I've had some people able to recognize it enough to be able to say, I appreciate what you're saying to me, but I really have the Lord's peace. The Lord has given me peace about this situation, and I can't explain it other than just saying He gave it to me because I know that I should be a mess right now, but I'm not; I'm peaceful.

I've had that happen. I've had it happen on a few occasions, and it is a wonderful thing. And the only thing that you can say is the Lord is guarding my heart right now. I know there are all these enemies that are trying to press in and make my heart unsettled, but for some reason, God has put a shield, a guard up around my heart, and it's not getting in.

And that's what Paul promises here. The peace of Christ, which surpasses understanding, will guard your heart and your mind in Christ Jesus.

But I want you to understand something about this kind of peace. It doesn't just happen. In other words, what I'm saying is it's a conditional peace. God's love is unconditional, but his peace has requirements that go along with it.

Look at verse 6 again: *“do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be known to God.”* And then Paul goes on to give the promise and the peace of God, right? But the condition is distance yourself from anxious thoughts, spend time in prayer, include times of thanksgiving in your prayer.

That's tough to do when you're scared. I mean, when you're kind of a hot mess inside, and you're thinking, okay, I need to offer up a prayer with thanksgiving. Okay, but just spending time in praise can be just such a wonderful distraction. And then he says, as we make our request known to God, as we lay out our petition before the Lord, the peace of God, which surpasses understanding, will guard your heart and your mind.

And then the last two verses: *“Finally, 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, (he doesn't say do these things, does he? Oh, we're back to the mind; he says) think about these things.”* We're back to what we think about. We're back to what's in our hearts. Think about these things. And then, in the last verse, verse 9, he talks about the example that he has given and encourages them to follow it. But this whole idea of what we think about is so critical.

Here's another verse that you've probably committed to memory—some of you—about what we think about. Our minds are not unlike a computer. They're so much more superior to a man-made computer, but not unlike a computer in the sense that you kind of get out of your life what you put into your mind. A computer's like that. A computer can't—can only do what it's programmed to do, and a mind operates in a similar fashion in the sense that what you put in is going to find its way out in the way, in the things that your life produces.

I love how the New King James, rather than saying think about these things, actually says meditate on these things. That's a good word. The New American Standard Bible actually uses the word dwell. Dwell on these things. Those two words are better than think because think could be a momentary thought that goes through your mind, but “to meditate” and “to dwell” means to stay on something.

So, Paul gives us these eight things which, he says, are key to our growth and stability as a Christian, how we think the things on which we dwell and meditate.

Let's put them on the screen as a list for us here so we can kind of look at them together.

- True
- Honorable
- Just
- Pure
- Lovely
- Commendable
- Excellent
- Praiseworthy

He says think about that which is true, not false. People, can I just tell you something? The most powerful weapon of the enemy is to get you to meditate on that which is false because, you see, when he speaks, he speaks his native language. He lies. Satan can't help but lie; it's what he does; it's who he is; he is a lie.

Whereas Jesus said, I am the truth. So, you and I are to meditate on that which is true, and that means we have to put out of our mind anything that we have entertained, which is from the enemy and is just perpetuating falsehoods and false beliefs in our lives.

And there are many things that we ponder in our minds that we don't even think about or we don't even stop to consider, is this true? We have accepted it as true, and it's usually something having to do with you and your failings or how much God loves or doesn't love you or something like that.

The enemy sows this seed of falsehood in your life, and you meditate on it, and guess what? It affects the way you live; it affects the way you relate to God; it affects the way you relate to other people. Those things need to be exposed, and you and I need to say, is that what the Word says?

Sometimes, people will come up to me and they'll make a statement that I know the enemy has planted in their hearts. And I'll ask them, is that what the Word says? And they'll say, well, no, but it's what I believe. Yeah, see, that's a problem. You've embraced a falsehood. You've embraced a lie, and it's going to

affect the entire—the whole stability of your Christian life. So be careful what you meditate on, what you ponder. Make sure it's true.

Make sure it's also honorable, worthy of honor. The things that you're thinking about, are they honorable?

How about just? You and I don't usually use that word, but it means morally right and fair. When you stop and think, when you meditate on something, is it morally right? Is it morally fair?

Is it pure? Because that's something else you and I are to think about, and pure just basically means uncontaminated.

Is it lovely? Or is it ugly? If it's a thought towards somebody else that's unbecoming, it's ugly. We're to think of things that are lovely.

Is it commendable? In other words, something you could be commended for, something the Lord would say, well done, in the thought process of that thing.

Is it excellent? Of the highest level of quality?

Is it praiseworthy?

These are important things. Paul says that these, in fact, are the proper things for our minds to ponder, and when we direct our thoughts in this way, he says that we will be guarded by the peace of God.

One last passage to throw in the mix. From Romans 12:2, Paul writes:

Romans 12:2 (ESV)

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind...

Do not be conformed to this world (which is the thinking, the pattern of action, and so forth), but (we're to) be transformed by the renewal of (our) your mind...

And this is one of those areas where we just have to kind of confess to the Lord, I can be so worldly sometimes, and my thinking is just so bad, so worldly, so founded in the things of this life rather than the things that are above.

I got to tell you I was really convicted even to get up and share this message with you because I'm just like you, and my— let's just put it this way, if all of us had our thoughts put on that screen, we'd be horrified, wouldn't we? And I don't think there's anybody here that is immune to that whole thing. So, this morning, before we left to come to church, I just grabbed Sue, and we sat down on the couch, and I said, you just need to pray for me because I—every once in a while, I just have to come before the Lord and just say, Lord, I am so unworthy to share the truth of your Word because just like Paul said in the last chapter, brothers, I would have you know that I have not attained to these things. I've not arrived.

And I don't think there's one person in this room who doesn't deal at times with thoughts that are unbecoming a believer. But God cares about what we think about because it affects the kind of people we are, and it affects how we relate to Him, and it affects how we relate to others. It affects our marriages; it affects our child raising; it affects our work environment; I believe it affects our physical bodies. It's very, very far-reaching.

And so, what we think about, what we love, what we long for, what we cherish in our hearts.