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Week 10: Fighting for Peace, Joy, Trust, and Right Thinking (Phil. 4:1–9)

The Place of the Passage

By [Philippians 4:1](#), Paul begins to wrap up his letter to the Philippians. He confronts one specific case of disunity in the church, providing its members (and us) with concrete directives for dealing with conflict ([Phil. 4:2–3](#)). He then turns to a series of pithy commands ([Phil. 4:4–9](#)), which in many ways summarize and materialize several themes and ideals from earlier in the epistle.

The Big Picture

The Philippians are to stand firm by pursuing peace, joy, gentleness, trust, prayer, and right thinking—matters that Paul has taught and modeled for them.

Definition: Meditation

Contemplation on something, such as the attributes of God, with focused attention (see [Ps. 1:2](#)). Biblical meditation stands in contrast to many forms of Eastern meditation, which seek to empty the mind of rational thought.

Gospel Glimpses

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IN THE LORD. Paul uses the phrase “in the Lord” three times in a short span. The church is to “stand firm . . . in the Lord” ([Phil. 4:1](#)), Euodia and Syntyche are to “agree in the Lord” ([Phil. 4:2](#)), and all are to “rejoice in the Lord” ([Phil. 4:4](#)). A few verses later, he writes similarly of hearts and minds being guarded “in Christ Jesus” ([Phil. 4:7](#)). Paul is a big fan of these “in” phrases: in him, in Christ, in the Lord, etc. With these “in” phrases, Paul is alluding to the doctrine of the believer’s “union with Christ.” This union begins with being “found *in him*, not having a righteousness of my own . . . but that which comes through faith in Christ” ([Phil. 3:9](#)). It is “in Christ” that we also receive all of God’s saving promises and benefits (see [Phil. 2:1, 5](#)). Thus, “we glory in Christ Jesus” ([Phil. 3:3](#)). What an important preposition.

FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION. Because every believer is “in Christ,” believers are in Christ together. Communion with Christ includes communion with others in the body of Christ (the church). Of course, this doesn’t mean that there aren’t disagreements or conflicts between Christians—even mature and experienced Christians; Euodia and Syntyche had “labored side by side” with Paul ([Phil. 4:3](#)), and yet their disagreement rose to such a level that news of it reached Rome. It troubled Paul enough that he addressed them by name in a public letter to the whole church. He pleads with them to “agree in the Lord” ([Phil. 4:2](#)). In essence he is saying, Ladies, recognize what you share, recognize your identity, recognize the saving benefits in Christ ([Phil. 2:1–2](#)), and recognize them in each other. Paul isn’t naïve and he isn’t suggesting that agreement can be reached by sweeping conflict under the rug. Concerns will have to be discussed, confession eventually made, and forgiveness granted. But the relationships themselves are often complicated. Thus, Paul calls on a “true companion”—unknown to us but obviously known to Paul and the Philippians—to “help these women” get along ([Phil. 4:3](#)). This is simply the church exchanging self-interests for the “interests of others” ([Phil. 2:4](#)), and

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working out salvation with one another ([Phil. 2:12](#)). It is a corporate enterprise.

Whole-Bible Connections

PEACE. The concept of peace is fundamental to [Philippians 4](#). Not only is the word used twice (“peace of God,” [Phil. 4:7](#); “God of peace,” [Phil. 4:9](#)), but Paul also alludes to peace with other words. Euodia and Syntyche need to pursue peace ([Phil. 4:2](#)). A gentle spirit (“reasonableness,” [Phil. 4:5](#)) is one that is inwardly and outwardly at peace. Anxiety is the absence of inner peace. Prayer is the antidote to anxiety and the path to God’s supernatural peace ([Phil. 4:6–7](#)). Peace is also a theme significant to the whole Bible. In many ways, God’s plan can be charted through this lens: peace created in the garden, lost in the fall, and restored progressively by God. God’s plan to restore peace is first seen in the promises and shadows of the Old Testament, but ultimately through the “Prince of Peace” ([Isa. 9:6](#)), Jesus, in the New Testament. In his coming, dying, and rising, and his Spirit’s drawing, the peace of Christ penetrates lives, permeates relationships, and comforts hearts. The Prince of Peace will come again to bring final judgment on the world and final salvation to his own, thereby bringing all his promises for peace to their fulfillment.

THE BOOK OF LIFE. Paul refers to his ministry partners as people “whose names are in the book of life” ([Phil. 4:3](#)). This “book of life” is mentioned several times in the book of Revelation in connection with the final judgment ([Rev. 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27](#)). Moses spoke similarly when he asked

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God to either forgive the Israelites or “blot me out of your book that you have written” ([Ex. 32:32](#)). So too David when he lamented God’s enemies: “Let them be blotted out of the book of the living; let them not be enrolled among the righteous” ([Ps. 69:28](#)). The imagery should be obvious. This book is the roll of God’s “elect.” It divides all humanity. Those not in this book will face terrible, eternal demise (see [Rev. 20:15](#)). But those written in it by God’s sovereign grace can rejoice even now. As Jesus told his disciples upon their return from a successful mission, “Do not rejoice . . . that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven” ([Luke 10:20](#)).

Theological Soundings

OMNIPRESENCE. When Paul writes the pithy words, “The Lord is at hand” ([Phil. 4:5](#)), he may have in mind the nearness of the Lord’s return. This is certainly something Paul has referred to before in Philipians ([Phil. 1:10; 3:11, 21](#)), and the ever-nearness of the second coming is something he spoke of elsewhere ([1 Thess. 5:1](#)). More likely, however, in [Philippians 4:5](#), Paul has in mind the *spatial* nearness, not the *temporal* nearness, of the Lord. Theologians call this God’s “omnipresence.” God is everywhere; he sees and knows all. Of course, this reality has significant implications and massive motivating power (as is Paul’s intent in citing it in [Phil. 4:5](#)). Nothing is hidden from God’s eyes ([Jer. 16:17](#)). This is an awe-filling reality. And yet God’s omnipresence need not conjure up only feelings of fear and threat; it is enormously comforting for those who also know of the Lord’s goodness and care (see [Ps. 139:1-6](#)).

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SOVEREIGNTY. Paul sees the Christian’s battle against anxiety as one fought by praying ([Phil. 4:6](#)). Such an equation pivots on the sovereignty of God. We pray because he is sovereign and we are not. We lack the power to alter most difficult circumstances; we lack the wisdom to know what is best; and we lack the perspective to know best in the grand scheme of God’s plan. Whether explicitly spoken as such or not, anxiety signals discontentment with God’s plan, or lack of confidence in it. Fretting implies that God doesn’t see, doesn’t care, or can’t change things. The anxious heart turns inward, rehashing problems with *self*—almost as a form of self-prayer! But in *true* prayer, burdens are brought to the One who is wise and good, and he works accordingly. And he also supernaturally comforts and guards restless hearts ([Phil. 4:7](#)).

Personal Implications

Take time to reflect on the implications of [Philippians 4:1–9](#) for your own life today. Consider what you have learned that might lead you to praise God, repent of sin, and trust in his gracious promises. Note the personal implications for your walk with the Lord in light of the (1) Gospel Glimpses, (2) Whole-Bible Connections, (3) Theological Soundings, and (4) this passage as a whole.

1. Gospel Glimpses
2. Whole-Bible Connections
3. Theological Soundings
4. [Philippians 4:1–9](#)

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As You Finish This Unit . . .

Take a moment now to ask for the Lord's blessing and help as you continue in this study of Philippians. And take a moment also to look back through this unit of study, reflecting on a few key things that the Lord may be teaching you and noting things to review again in the future.

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