

With Thanksgiving

Thanksgiving Sunday 23' - Pastor Jonathan Combs - November 26, 2023 - Philippians 4:4-9

INTRO: Good morning church! I hope you had a wonderful Thanksgiving with your friends and family.

Need: Sometimes it can be difficult to be thankful. Sometimes you can't seem to look past the negative to see the good in your life. There are so many challenges both personal and in our world that can really steal our gratitude and our joy. You are not alone, look what we faced this year (2023) together:

1. Wars and rumors of wars; the war between Russia and Ukraine has escalated and some say could lead to WW3, Hamas attacked Israel leading to a major conflict,
2. Foreign entities have spied through social media, sent spy balloons and have flooded our streets with fentanyl,
3. Mass shooting in Lewiston, Maine kills 18; Allen, Texas, 9 dead; Covenant Christian School, Nashville, TN, 3 teachers and 3 children dead; Robb Elementary, Uvalde, TX, 2 teachers and 19 children dead. And then there's what you've personally felt,
4. Inflation hit a 40 year high. Gas costs more, food costs more, rent costs more, mortgage rates went up. "The average family is spending about \$700 more per month on the same goods and services relative to two years ago." (Moody's Analytics)
5. Antidepressant usage has increased by over 35% over the last 6 years. People are more stressed and depressed.

Trans: Sounds like a lot to be thankful for. But perhaps true thanksgiving doesn't come from better circumstances. Maybe thanksgiving is a spiritual muscle that has to be worked out. Perhaps it's possible to be truly thankful all the more in those dark days. Perhaps it's possible to be joyful and thankful even in a prison cell, unsure whether you will be released or executed ...

BODY: In Philippians chapter 4, while imprisoned in Rome, the apostle Paul encouraged the believers in Philippi to put their faith into practice and the God of peace would be with them. We can put our faith into practice and the God of peace will be with us. How can we put our faith into practice? The text gives **four exercises** to put our faith into practice.

Read text: Philippians 4:4-9 (ESV) 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.

Four exercises to put our faith into practice:

1. Rejoice in the Lord always.

EXP: (9) The apostle Paul summarizes this section of Scripture with "practice" it. The KJV says now "do" it. The word practice has to do with work it out, exercise it, put your faith into practice.

"Practice" (9) (πράσσω, *prassō*) - to exercise, practise, to be busy with, carry on.

(4) The first exercise is rejoice. Work out your joy muscle ...

"Rejoice" (4, 2x) (χαίρω, *chairō*) (**PAM**) - to rejoice, be glad, to rejoice exceedingly, to be well, thrive.

"Always" (4) (πάντοτε, *pantote*) - at all times, always, ever

"It has been well said that this whole epistle may be summed up in two short sentences: 'I rejoice'; 'Rejoice ye!' This continual refrain of gladness is all the more remarkable if we remember the Apostle's circumstances ... a prisoner, dependent on Christian charity for a living; uncertain as to 'how it shall be with

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me,' and obliged to contemplate the possibility of being 'offered,' or poured out as a libation, 'on the sacrifice and service of your faith.'" (MacLaren's Commentary)

ARG: Psalm 33:1 (AMP) Rejoice in the LORD, you righteous ones; Praise is becoming and appropriate for those who are upright.

Rejoicing isn't dependent on the situation but upon the Savior:

Habakkuk 3:17-19 (NIV) ¹⁷ Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, ¹⁸ yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior. ¹⁹ The Sovereign Lord is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to tread on the heights.

ILL: So the resounding biblical truth seems to be that joy or rejoicing isn't the result of better times but rather a closer union with Jesus Christ; this is the foundation of real gladness.

Some have discovered a similar truth in other areas ... take love for instance. Is true love the kind of love that is romantic when both people look their best? Or is kind when the other person is kind? Or is generous when the other is generous? No, that is puppy love. True love loves when the other looks and acts their worst. True love is persevering love, is a love that bleeds together. You discover something in that place about yourself, that you long for a love that won't fail.

So it is with rejoicing. Everyone rejoices in plenty, only the wise rejoice in the Lord always. Only the righteous can praise in lack because they see God.

APP: Will you rejoice in the Lord always? Exercising your will to celebrate the Savior though the crops don't yield or do yield an abundance, no matter the circumstance because He is worthy. He then pours out His joy and thanksgiving.

2. **Be known** for the gentleness of God.

EXP: (5) The second exercise is about what we are projecting to those around us. Are we known for the gentleness and grace of God or something else? What are you known for: short-fused, rough, rude?

"Let your reasonableness" (5) (ἐπιεικής, *epieikēs*) - seeming, suitable, equitable, fair, mild, gentle, moderation, reasonableness, graciousness or forbearance

Philippians 4:5 (AMP) Let your gentle spirit [your graciousness, unselfishness, mercy, tolerance, and patience] be known to all people. The Lord is near.

"Be known" (5) (γινώσκω, *ginōskō*) (**APM**) - to learn to know, come to know, get a knowledge of perceive, feel, to become known

"The Lord is at hand" (5) (ἐγγύς, *engus*) - near, of place and position, those who are near access to God, of times imminent and soon to come pass

Put Christlikeness on display and all the more since the Day of the Lord is fast approaching. We know not when He will return but He is at hand, at any hour He might show up and for me, I want to be living according to His purpose.

ARG: **Gentleness looks like speaking with kindness and courtesy:**

Titus 3:2 (ESV) To speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people.

Gentleness looks like selflessness, humility and the attitude of Christ:

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Philippians 2:3-5 (NLT) Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too. You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.

ILL: Jesus asked His disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" "Well," they replied, "some say John the Baptist, some say Elijah, and others say Jeremiah or one of the other prophets." Then he asked them, "But who do you say I am?" And Peter answered true, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." (Matthew 16)

People knew Jesus was unique, those at a distance thought Him a great prophet. But those closest to Him knew that He was even better, He was their Savior. Later after the death and resurrection of Jesus, His disciples received the greatest compliment that any man could receive, after defending the Gospel before the Jewish council "they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and they recognized that they had been with Jesus." (Acts 4:13)

APP: Who do people say that you are? Would they be amazed and recognize that you have been with Jesus? Do this exercise with your families today, perhaps around the lunch table. Ask them to describe you with one word.

3. Pray for everything with thanksgiving.

EXP: (6-7) The third exercise is turning worry into prayer. Like turning fat into lean muscle takes better habits and practice, so it is with this spiritual exercise.

"Do not be anxious" (6) (μεριμνάω, *merimnaō*) (PAM) - to be anxious, to be troubled with cares

"Prayer and supplication" (6) (δέησις, *deēsis*) - need, indigence, want, privation, penury, a seeking, asking, entreating, entreaty to God or to man

"Thanksgiving" (6) (εὐχαριστία, *eucharistia*) - thankfulness, the giving of thanks

"Let your requests" (6) (αἴτημα, *aitēma*) - petition, request, required

"Be made known" (6) (γνωρίζω, *gnōrizō*) (PPM) - to make known, to become known, be recognised, to know, to gain knowledge of, thorough knowledge of

"Peace of God" (7) (εἰρήνη, *eirēnē*) - harmony, concord, security, safety, prosperity, felicity, (because peace and harmony make and keep things safe and prosperous)

"Surpasses" (7) (ὑπερέχω, *huperechō*) - to have or hold over one, to stand out, rise above, overtop, to be above, be superior in rank, authority, power, to excel, to be superior, better than, to surpass

"Guard" (7) (φρουρέω, *phroureō*) - to guard, protect by a military guard, either to prevent hostile invasion, or to keep the inhabitants of a besieged city from flight

ARG: Pray often and about everything: Consistently with thanksgiving:

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 (ESV) ¹⁶ Rejoice always, ¹⁷ pray without ceasing, ¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

Colossians 4:2 (ESV) Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.

Consistently with thanksgiving:

Ephesians 5:20 (NIV) Always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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ILL: My dear brother Adam is preaching today at our Wilson campus and we studied together this week. We spent a large portion of time discussing this very exercise; the exercise of prayer and its effect on our lives. Many writers concluded that prayer cures worry and he and I debated this notion. We agreed that it is true in the sense that prayerfulness overcomes worry. That is, a discipline of prayerfulness overcomes worry.

Follow me ... a one time prayer will not often overcome anything. God may show you a great deal of grace and relieve your problem after prayer #1, but He usually doesn't. Here's why I think that is, because He is more interested in shaping your lifestyle towards Christlikeness than He is about fixing your problems. Our spiritual fitness is not so very different from our physical one.

I've never met anyone who truly believed you can go to the gym one time and expect six pack abs. Or who would eat one healthy meal and expect their weight to fall off. So why do we expect one prayer to make us spiritually fit enough to face this dangerous and chaotic world. Trust me, that 1st prayer matters just as that first workout does because it begins the process of overcoming.

APP: Where do you take your worry, how do you deal with it? We have the opportunity to come moment by moment into the throne room of our all powerful God who loves us and ask for His mercy and grace. Make prayer your go-to plan.

4. Think about anything worthy of praise.

EXP: (8-9) The fourth exercise is a shift in thinking, looking past what hurts right now to see the bigger picture of God's goodness. Some have called this Paul's explosion of superlatives:

"**True**" (8) (ἀληθής, *alēthēs*) - true, loving the truth, speaking the truth, truthful

"**Honorable**" (8) (σεμνός, *semnos*) - august, venerable, reverend, to be venerated for character, honorable

"**Just**" (8) (δίκαιος, *dikaios*) - righteous, observing divine laws, in a wide sense, upright, righteous, virtuous, keeping the commands of God

"**Pure**" (8) (ἀγνός, *hagnos*) - exciting reverence, venerable, sacred, pure from carnality, chaste, modest, clean

"**Lovely**" (8) (προσφιλής, *prospilēs*) - acceptable, pleasing, lovely

"**Commendable**" (8) (εὐφημος, *euphēmos*) - of good report, sounding well, uttering words of good omen, speaking auspiciously

"**Excellence**" (8) (ἀρετή, *aretē*) - a virtuous course of thought, feeling and action, virtue, moral goodness, any particular moral excellence, as modesty, purity

"**Worthy of praise**" (8) (ἔπαινος, *epainos*) - approbation, commendation, praise

"**Think**" (8) (λογίζομαι, *logizomai*) (PMM) - to reckon, count, compute, calculate, count over, to take into account, to make an account of

"**Learned, received, heard, seen**" (9) - The Gospel preached, read and observed ...

"**Practice**" (9) (πράσσω, *prassō*) - to exercise, practise, to be busy with, carry on

ARG: The things most worthy of praise are those from above:

Colossians 3:2-3 (ESV) Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

ILL:

APP: Will you choose to see beyond what's right in front of you? Perhaps just beyond your view is a goodness that you have forgotten or overlooked. Choose to set your mind on things above.

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CONCLUSION: Will you put your faith into practice and experience the presence of the God of peace in your life by:

- Rejoicing in Him always
- Putting His gentleness on display
- Praying about everything with thanksgiving
- Thinking on His goodness to you

Let's Pray.