

Fortifying the Mind

Philippians 4:4-9

Online Sermon:

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Before Apostle Paul finished his letter with thanks and personal greetings, he gave five ways the Philippians could fortify their minds so that they might live their lives worthy of the Gospel of Christ. First, Paul says to “rejoice in the Lord always, I will say it again: Rejoice” (4:4)! Rejoicing, the thread that is intertwined all throughout his letter to Philippi,¹ is to “always” be first most thing upon our minds! The joy of the Lord is our strength (Nehemiah 8:10),² the “Christian’s distinguishing mark (Romans 12:12), a characteristic of the kingdom of God (Romans 14:17), and a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22–23; cf. Romans 14:17; 1 Thessalonians 1:6).”³ Rejoicing is not just having a positive attitude but instead is joy

¹ Peter Thomas O’Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 485.

² R. Kent Hughes, *Philippians: The Fellowship of the Gospel*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 166.

³ Peter Thomas O’Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 486.

⁴ Paul Barnett, *Philippians & Philemon: Joy in the Lord*, ed. Paul Barnett, Reading the Bible Today Series (Sydney, South NSW: Aquila Press, 2016), 110–111.

that wells up like the springs of living waters in those who “locate themselves in Christ, in whom is found righteousness and sanctification and redemption (1 Corinthians 1:30).”⁴ Inexpressible joy is not about getting⁵ the perishable trinkets



and toys of this world. It can only be found in realizing there is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:1-2). Those who have been brought

out of the miry pit of sin, those whose feet have been placed on the secure rock of salvation and those born of the Spirit are to sing a new song (Psalms 40:2-2)⁶ based on every blessing (Ephesians 1:3) they have in their Lord, Savior, and King. Since many of the greatest heroes of the faith have gone through “seasons of tribulations and discouragements,”⁷ Paul said one is to rejoice “always” signifying that our joy is not to be found in

⁵ Tony Merida and Francis Chan, *Exalting Jesus in Philippians*, ed. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2016), 172.

⁶ R. Kent Hughes, *Philippians: The Fellowship of the Gospel*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 167.

⁷ Tony Merida and Francis Chan, *Exalting Jesus in Philippians*, ed. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2016), 171.

our circumstances but in our eternal relationship with our Lord!⁸ Are we to thank the Lord when we “doubt, lose a loved one, in illness, during relational difficulties,”⁹ financial problems, trials and tribulations? Yes, the song of thanksgiving and joy must not leave our minds or stop from being sung on our lips!

*“Even if the road is hard, remember that He has planned your path, **Psa. 37:23**. He has promised to make all things work for good, **Rom. 8:28**. He has promised to go with you through everything in life, **Heb. 13:5**. He has promised you abiding victory, **1 Cor. 15:57; Rom. 8:37**. He has promised us that the destination will be worth every mile of the trip, **Rom. 8:18; 2 Cor. 4:17**.”¹⁰*

Remember Paul wasn’t writing from a “Roman bath or sipped espresso in Café Roman”¹¹ but in a dungy prison in Rome facing possible execution and yet he felt inexpressible joy in Christ who began and would finish a good work in him (1:6)!

⁸ Tony Merida and Francis Chan, [Exalting Jesus in Philippians](#), ed. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2016), 172.

⁹ Tony Merida and Francis Chan, [Exalting Jesus in Philippians](#), ed. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2016), 171–172.

Reflection. To the church of Corinth Paul wrote, “for our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all” (2 Corinthians 4:17). There are many circumstances in life that if we let them can crush our souls and make us feel like the living waters are being quenched and our joy in the Lord is being drained. And yet if even all we can do is crawl towards the Good Shepherd let us do so to trade yokes with Him (Matthew 11:29-30) and despite our afflictions, our struggles, and our persecutions; may we drink deeply from His grace and mercy and realize He is far from done showing you His beloved child glimpses of His glory! And should all He give you is but a crumb from His table then rejoice for that is all we need to experience the miraculous, peace and joy in His loving embrace and presence!

Build the Wall of Gentleness

The second thing Paul recommends one to do to fortify one’s mind is to “let your gentleness be evident to all, for the Lord is near” (4:5). The Greek word *epieikēs*¹² is difficult to translate into English, however words such as “gentle, yielding,

¹⁰ Alan Carr, [“How to Fortify Your Mind \(Philippians 4:4–8\)”](#), in *The Sermon Notebook: New Testament* (Lenoir, NC: Alan Carr, 2015), 3020.

¹¹ R. Kent Hughes, [Philippians: The Fellowship of the Gospel](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 165.

¹² Paul Barnett, [Philippians & Philemon: Joy in the Lord](#), ed. Paul Barnett, Reading the Bible Today Series (Sydney, South NSW: Aquila Press, 2016), 111.

kind, forbearing, lenient,”¹³ “moderation, reasonable”¹⁴ and “fairmindedness”¹⁵ fairly represent what Paul meant by this word. In the context of prior verses Paul is saying that shining like stars in the sky (2:15) is only possible when cultivated in the



fertile soil of a heart that puts the interests of others above that of one's own (2:45). When one imitates the “self-love”¹⁶ of this warped and crooked generation then others can easily “wear on our

last nerve” and provoke within us a “desire to retaliate and get vengeance.”¹⁷ Though they were “stripped of their honor and treated unjustly”¹⁸ by the Judaizers, the Roman government, and by those who preached Christ out of envy and rivalry (1:15); the Philippians were not to respond with harshness or retaliation but instead were to imitate the character of Christ who did not insist

on His rights but instead in meekness and gentleness (2 Corinthians 10:1)¹⁹ became a servant to all. Joy is not found in selfish ambition or vain conceit (2:3) but in an open heart that is filled with generous love,²⁰ grace and mercy towards everyone, even one's own enemies (Matthew 5:43-48)! “Paul's message to the Philippians was to rediscover their practical unity.” If Euodia and Syntyche would only exercise forbearance and gentleness towards each other by being “like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and mind” (2:2), then the spiritual health of the Philippian church would be restored!²¹

Our light shines brightest in this world not by torches of animosity and self-absorption but with a “rejoicing spirit that is gentle” and living rightly with the truth that the Lord is always near.

One should strive day by day, moment by moment, to live one's life worthy of the Gospel because the Lord is here and there in a

¹³ Homer A. Kent Jr., “[Philippians](#),” in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Ephesians through Philemon*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 11 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 151.

¹⁴ R. Kent Hughes, *Philippians: The Fellowship of the Gospel*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 167.

¹⁵ Ralph P. Martin, *Philippians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 11, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 174.

¹⁶ Alan Carr, “[How to Fortify Your Mind \(Philippians 4:4-8\)](#),” in *The Sermon Notebook: New Testament* (Lenoir, NC: Alan Carr, 2015), 3021.

¹⁷ Alan Carr, “[How to Fortify Your Mind \(Philippians 4:4-8\)](#),” in *The Sermon Notebook: New Testament* (Lenoir, NC: Alan Carr, 2015), 3020.

¹⁸ G. Walter Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 289.

¹⁹ R. Kent Hughes, *Philippians: The Fellowship of the Gospel*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 167.

²⁰ H. D. M. Spence-Jones, ed., *Philippians*, The Pulpit Commentary (London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1909), 156.

²¹ Paul Barnett, *Philippians & Philemon: Joy in the Lord*, ed. Paul Barnett, Reading the Bible Today Series (Sydney, South NSW: Aquila Press, 2016), 111.

person's heart,²² and will return soon²³ and one wants to be found doing His will when He arrives!

Reflection. How would your closest friends, colleagues, acquaintances and even your enemies describe your personality? Would they say that you are gentle, filled with grace and mercy when dealing with others? Are you living right now as a citizen of heaven knowing the Lord could return at any moment? Do you currently know someone in need but despite having the resources refuse to help them? If not, then how can one say that one is looking out for the interests of others above that of one's own? When others treat you poorly do you respond with animosity or with love? Are you willing to walk a mile in your enemy's shoes and give that person figuratively "the shirt off your back." Though we were His enemies did not Christ give us far more than we could ever ask or imagine so why not share the comfort we have received with those created in His image?

²² R. Kent Hughes, *Philippians: The Fellowship of the Gospel*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 168.

²³ Tony Merida and Francis Chan, *Exalting Jesus in Philippians*, ed. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2016), 174.

²⁴ R. Kent Hughes, *Philippians: The Fellowship of the Gospel*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 168.

Do not be Anxious!

The third thing Paul recommends one to do to fortify one's mind is to "not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your



requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus" (4:6-7)! In the face of poverty, hunger,²⁴ economic discrimination,²⁵

persecution by many opponents, concern over Paul's fate, the health of Epaphroditus, and the conflict between Euodia and Syntyche;²⁶ the Philippians had become overwhelmed with anxiety. Joy is easily squeezed out of us²⁷ when fear fills our soul that we either might lose something valuable to us or come

²⁵ Paul Barnett, *Philippians & Philemon: Joy in the Lord*, ed. Paul Barnett, Reading the Bible Today Series (Sydney, South NSW: Aquila Press, 2016), 112.

²⁶ Tony Merida and Francis Chan, *Exalting Jesus in Philippians*, ed. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2016), 176.

²⁷ Tony Merida and Francis Chan, *Exalting Jesus in Philippians*, ed. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2016), 176.

to believe we might have to face a future filled with turmoil.²⁸ Like the Philippians anxiety makes us go into survival mode, completely absorbed into our own well being rather than looking out for the interests of others.²⁹ Anxiety is “functional atheism because you’re living as through God doesn’t exist, as if He’s not the all-sovereign ruler over all.”³⁰

The cure for anxiety is prayer!³¹ In every situation we are to cast our burdens upon the Lord who promises to sustain us (Psalms 55:22).³² We do this not because God is unaware of the sources of our anxiety³³ but to be “open about our needs before God” so that “in our emptiness in His presence” we might cultivate an attitude of complete surrender, thanksgiving and trust in His sovereign care over our lives!³⁴

²⁸ Tony Merida and Francis Chan, [Exalting Jesus in Philippians](#), ed. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2016), 175.

²⁹ Tony Merida and Francis Chan, [Exalting Jesus in Philippians](#), ed. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2016), 176.

³⁰ Tony Merida and Francis Chan, [Exalting Jesus in Philippians](#), ed. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2016), 175.

³¹ Tony Merida and Francis Chan, [Exalting Jesus in Philippians](#), ed. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2016), 179.

³² Tony Merida and Francis Chan, [Exalting Jesus in Philippians](#), ed. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2016), 179.

“Human abilities of perceptive insights and reflective intelligence cannot resolve conflict”³⁵ for who can control Tomorrow.³⁶ When we make our requests to God Paul says we are to do so with “thanksgiving because thankfulness is the posture of grace.”³⁷ Echoing Jesus’ words in Matthew 6:25-34, we are not to worry about what we will eat, drink, or wear but seek first the kingdom of God, with “confidence of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ” (1:6)! Praying does not mean our trials and tribulations will be removed but merely that the Lord will replace our anxiety with His peace.³⁸ The peace the Lord gives us is His very own peace that defies all human rational thought and transcends our understanding. It is assurance that the Lord always does good to those who love Him and is always near and providing sovereign security to His own!

³³ R. Kent Hughes, [Philippians: The Fellowship of the Gospel](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 169.

³⁴ G. Walter Hansen, [The Letter to the Philippians](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 292.

³⁵ G. Walter Hansen, [The Letter to the Philippians](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 293.

³⁶ Tony Merida and Francis Chan, [Exalting Jesus in Philippians](#), ed. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2016), 178.

³⁷ R. Kent Hughes, [Philippians: The Fellowship of the Gospel](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 169.

³⁸ Paul Barnett, [Philippians & Philemon: Joy in the Lord](#), ed. Paul Barnett, Reading the Bible Today Series (Sydney, South NSW: Aquila Press, 2016), 113.

Reflection. Are there circumstances in your life that are causing you to be anxious? Are you worried about the future that is not known nor can it be controlled? Are you worried about the well being of someone else who is going through trials and tribulations? Are you trying to make a plan of escape from a dark cloud of trouble coming your way and the anxiety is having a toll on your friendships, marriage, and work life? Give it all to Jesus! Trade yokes with Him and trust that He will sustain and give you unspeakable peace in the most difficult of storms.

Think About the Right Things

After having told the Philippians that rejoicing, being gentle, not being anxious and praying were the keys to having the peace of God, he now preceded to tell them that another key to living a life worthy of the Gospel of Christ is to think about those things that are right in His sight! Believers have the mind of Christ and the power and responsibility to govern their

thoughts³⁹ in accordance with the words of life that they firmly hold onto (2:16). “Paul is calling for followers of Christ to be attentive, reflective, meditative thinkers;⁴⁰ for good thoughts



are necessary for good spiritual health.⁴¹ He gave six virtues that while the same list existed in Greek ethics⁴² went way beyond the “pagan religious ideal”⁴³ due to each of them being based on the character of Christ Himself! First, while “skeptics deny the existence of absolute truth,”⁴⁴ it exists and as the word of God is to be the

standard by which governs our thoughts. Part of Christ’s last will and testimony on this earth was that God His Father would “sanctify believes by the truth” (John 17:17).⁴⁵ Second, believers are turn away from “all that is ignoble, dishonorable, and vulgar”,⁴⁶ and think how to live a noble life that evokes honor to God the Father in heaven. Third, though no one is

³⁹ H. D. M. Spence-Jones, ed., [Philippians](#), The Pulpit Commentary (London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1909), 157–158.

⁴⁰ G. Walter Hansen, [The Letter to the Philippians](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 299.

⁴¹ F. F. Bruce, [Philippians](#), Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Peabody, MA: Baker Books, 2011), 145.

⁴² G. Walter Hansen, [The Letter to the Philippians](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 296.

⁴³ R. Kent Hughes, [Philippians: The Fellowship of the Gospel](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 174.

⁴⁴ H. D. M. Spence-Jones, ed., [Philippians](#), The Pulpit Commentary (London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1909), 157.

⁴⁵ Tony Merida and Francis Chan, [Exalting Jesus in Philippians](#), ed. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2016), 181.

⁴⁶ G. Walter Hansen, [The Letter to the Philippians](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 297.

righteous, not even one (Romans 3:10); this does not absolve the believer from the responsibility to seek, meditate and through the power of the Holy Spirit to try and live up to the high standards⁴⁷ of righteous living as defined by the character of God.⁴⁸ Remember, through the redemptive work of Christ⁴⁹ we are not only righteous in God's sight but also able to stop sinning and live a holy life (Romans 6:1-11; 1 Peter 1:15-16)! Fourth, we are to think about those things that are pure and holy and flee from anything that defiles our minds with evil.⁵⁰ Fifth, believers are to avoid thinking about anything repulsive or unjust in the Lord's eyes⁵¹ and only think about those things that are lovely, a sweet fragrance unto the Him!⁵² And lastly, believers are not to indulge in shameful, sinful, pleasure seeking thoughts but instead think about how to have such a good reputation as one who honors God that they truly do shine like stars to this warped and crooked generation (2:15). To make sure his list of virtues is "expansive and comprehensive" Paul finished by commanding the Philippians to emulate anything that is "excellent or praiseworthy." Instead of anxious thoughts these are to be replaced with

⁴⁷ Daniel M. Gurtner, "[Philippians](#)," in *The Bible Knowledge Background Commentary: Acts–Philemon*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Craig A. Bubeck, First Edition. (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2004), 586.

⁴⁸ R. Kent Hughes, [Philippians: The Fellowship of the Gospel](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 175.

⁴⁹ G. Walter Hansen, [The Letter to the Philippians](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 297.

virtuous thoughts so that one might live worthy of the Gospel of Christ!

Reflection. Living in a world that is not our home, one that hates the light because it exposes their evil deeds, is far from easy! We are constantly being taunted by images of the broad path and enticed by the temporal pleasures of life. In this passage Paul is telling us to not merely let our thoughts happened but invite the Spirit to cultivate deep furrows of right thinking into our minds. We have the mind of Christ now let's exercise it for the honor and glory of the Father!

Living the Word

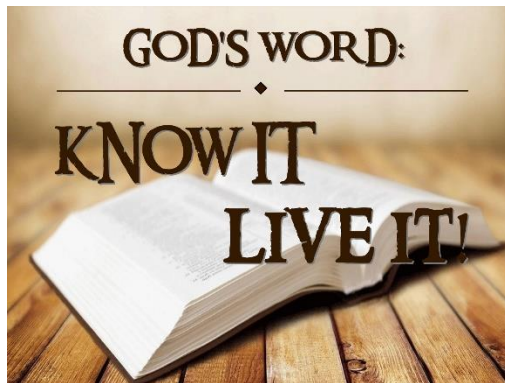
Paul concluded this part of his letter with one final imperative, "whatever you have learned or heard from me, or seen in me – put into practice. And the God of peace will be with you" (4:9). Our minds are incredibly complex and very capable of knowing but not accepting the God's righteousness. To seek whatever is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable,

⁵⁰ H. D. M. Spence-Jones, ed., [Philippians](#), The Pulpit Commentary (London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1909), 157.

⁵¹ Tony Merida and Francis Chan, [Exalting Jesus in Philippians](#), ed. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2016), 181.

⁵² F. F. Bruce, [Philippians](#), Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Peabody, MA: Baker Books, 2011), 146.

excellent of praiseworthy will not lead to holiness or experiencing the promised peace of God until such thoughts govern the way we live our lives. The “whatevers” must become the basis of the choices we make at home, in the shopping malls,



driving our cars, making financial decisions, building relationships, and all other aspects of our lives.⁵³ “The truth is, we have not learned “these things” until we have lived them out.”⁵⁴ While taking every thought captive

to obey Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5)⁵⁵ and be holy as God is holy is far from an easy task, we are not without help for we have the mind of Christ, the Spirit of truth, participate in the divine nature and a cloud of witnesses such as Apostle Paul to emulate. As a church we are to lock arms, be likeminded, share in our common love for God and one another (1:2). We are to emulate other believers, who in God’s strength and wisdom,

are walking in the footsteps of their Redeemer, Lord, Savior, and King!

We have but one life to live and the time has come to “get out of our chairs of theoretical reflection about Christ and the Christian life and press on towards the goal (3:14).⁵⁶

The peace of God that transcends all understanding is not received until first the ambassador and royal priest of God surrenders all to the One who bought him/her at the price of His very life. So, with our eyes fixed heavenward (3:14) and with the unshakeable assurance that to live is Christ and to die is gain (1:21) let us strive to know Christ and live our lives worthy of His Gospel, in His name, by His name, and for His glory!

⁵³ R. Kent Hughes, *Philippians: The Fellowship of the Gospel*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 178.

⁵⁴ R. Kent Hughes, *Philippians: The Fellowship of the Gospel*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 178.

⁵⁵ Tony Merida and Francis Chan, *Exalting Jesus in Philippians*, ed. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2016), 182.

⁵⁶ G. Walter Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 301.