

PAUL'S LETTER TO THE  
**PHILIPPIANS**

DAY

22 - 28

# DAY 22 - Unity

## Read Philippians 4:1-3

- 1** Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends!
- 2** I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. **3** Yes, and I ask you, my true companion, help these women since they have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.

The language that starts chapter 4 is very different from the beginning of chapter 3.

Paul started that section with words like 'dogs', 'evil doers' and 'mutilators of the flesh'. He ends it here in 4:1 with the affectionate words 'you whom I love and long for', 'my joy and crown' and 'dear friends'.

It seems that the threat posed from some in the beginning of chapter 3 has not made it into the life of the whole church, but Paul now addresses a different issue.

Throughout this letter Paul has emphasised their togetherness. He writes to 'all of you' and has spoken so much about their love for one another, standing firm together, contending as one person together etc.

We don't know what the issue between these two women named here was, or who they were, but it is clear that their disagreement troubles Paul enough to write about it in his letter. They have worked alongside Paul for the cause of the gospel, but now they are divided and it may be impacting the whole church.

There will always be people that we get on with more than others. There will also probably always be some people who we just find annoying... and people who find us annoying! That's not sinful, it's just reality.

What we mustn't do is allow a wedge to be driven between us and others in the family of God. It is better to deal with challenges quickly and maturely rather than letting them grow over time.

Paul shows us in this letter that we are strong together, that we should stand firm together, and that we are called to show love to each other. It is the same love that we see described in Paul's first letter to the church in Corinth.

### **Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a**

**4** Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. **5** It does not dishonour others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. **6** Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. **7** It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.  
**8** Love never fails.

Paul also reminds them that their names are written in the book of life. The image of a book of life is present in other places in the Bible and comes to be used to show those who will enter eternal life with Christ. They are all in that book. This is a perspective that could help them, and can help us, put aside our differences now because we will all share in the 'Day of Christ'.

### **Questions**

Are there people you have fallen out with?

Are we making an effort to live united as Paul (and Jesus) desired?

Are we more likely to talk *about* someone rather than speak *to* them about a problem?

Are you loving that person like we read in 1 Corinthians 13?

## **Actions**

Take some time praying for God's help to forgive those who have wronged us, then start the process of forgiving those people.

If it is difficult for you, then speak to someone you trust about this. It's not good to gossip about others, but if you're struggling then don't try and do this alone.

Remember, in Christ we all share in his Grace and will all live with him into eternity. Let that reality influence how we handle conflict.

# DAY 23 - Living in Peace part 1

## Read Philippians 4:4-7

**4** Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! **5** Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. **6** Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. **7** And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Paul again encourages us to 'rejoice in the Lord'. He reminds them of the deep joy they received when they came to faith in Christ and all the great things he has brought (and will bring) them. This joy in Christ, which he wants them to call to mind 'always', is the centre of everything in the Christian life.

Paul has shown across this letter that our ability to love each other, to serve each other and to be united with each other, all flow from knowing and remembering what Christ has done for us.

Now he shows us that that joy in remembering is also key if we are to combat anxiety.

Paul faced worrying circumstances (he's writing from Prison not knowing if he will live or die), but as we saw in chapter 1:20-26, he can still overcome his fears because he has not lost sight of the reality that his eternal future is secure in Christ. Now he instructs them to do the same.

He then gives them the tools to overcome their worries and anxieties. We'll look at two of them:

1. Prayer
2. Our thoughts

We'll look at prayer today and our thoughts tomorrow.

He tells us to pray with thanksgiving, bringing our requests before God. It can be liberating to know that I can bring my requests to God. I can bring my fears to God and he cares to listen and help me through them.

The promise being that God's own peace will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Worry can eat away at us, and gets us nowhere. Jesus also spoke about it in the Sermon on the Mount.

### **Read Matthew 6:25-34**

**25** "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? **26** Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? **27** Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?

**28** "And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labour or spin. **29** Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these. **30** If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? **31** So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' **32** For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. **33** But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. **34** Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Even in the middle of chaos and troubles (even those like Paul had), there can still be peace within our hearts and minds as we pray and rejoice.

Paul's declaration just before reminds them of the most incredible reality as they come to pray: 'The Lord is near'.

## **Questions**

Are we more familiar with anxiety or peace?

Where do we turn when feeling anxious, do we look for a short term distraction or to the source of peace?

Do we give up if we pray but don't feel instantly better?

When was the last time I gave some quality time to reminding myself of what Christ has done for me?

## **Actions**

Pray.

Start by thanking God for everything he has done for you: saved you, is at work in you, will raise you to eternal life. Then pray like Paul taught them and us to pray in the passage above.

Pray again! Don't reject the peace of God for a short term 'painkiller' or an easy distraction.

# DAY 24 - Living in Peace part 2

## Read Philippians 4:8-9

**8** Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. **9** Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

Yesterday we saw how Paul gives them (and us) the tools to overcome their worries and anxieties.

Yesterday we looked at prayer. Today we look at our thoughts.

Both of these are rooted in our joyful celebration of what Christ has done for us.

The perfect example of the things Paul encourages them to think about is what Christ has done for us, so this can be our starting point (and something we should keep coming back to), but it extends to 'whatever' can be described by these words we've just read.

This takes effort. Sometimes we find it hard to find good things to think about.

This takes discipline. We can drift back into focusing on negative things so quickly.

Many of us find it much easier to focus on negative or frustrating things. We fill our minds with things that could not be described by words like 'lovely' or 'pure' and then find ourselves full of anxiety.



Like a physiotherapist gives exercises to build strength in order to recover from injury and prevent it in the future, so Paul here gives us the exercises we need to build up our strength against anxiety and replace it with peace. Strength only grows when those exercises are actually used.

These are not some formula that instantly takes away our worries. Instead, both prayer and our thought life - built on rejoicing in what Christ has done for us - are exercises that can make us strong in our worries (or sometime just about strong enough to get through them).

The peace that we can have is not some distant concept, but comes from the reality that Paul stated just before he showed them how to pray in verse 5: 'The Lord is near'.

## **Questions**

Are we more familiar with anxiety or peace?

Where do we turn when feeling anxious, do we look for a short term distraction or to the source of peace?

Do I ever take time to think about the kind of things Paul describes, including my own salvation? Could that become a daily part of my life?

How much time a day do your thoughts get taken up with social media?

Is there any space for good thoughts to grow?

## **Actions**

Pray.

Start by thanking God for everything he has done for you: saved you, is at work in you, will raise you to eternal life.

When you notice yourself grumbling or complaining about someone or fixating on something that is causing you anxiety, make a choice to turn your thoughts to the work of Jesus instead.

Pray again! Don't reject the peace of God for a short term 'painkiller' or an easy distraction.

Remember: these are not some magical formula that instantly takes away our worries, instead they are exercises that can make us strong in them (or just strong enough to get through).

You could read the gospels: fill your mind with Jesus.

Set some boundaries around your social media use.

# DAY 25 - Content in all circumstances

## Read Philippians 4:10-17

**10** I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it.

**11** I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. **12** I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. **13** I can do all this through him who gives me strength. **14** Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. **15** Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; **16** for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid more than once when I was in need.

**17** Not that I desire your gifts; what I desire is that more be credited to your account.

We see how greatly the financial support that the church has sent Paul has been a blessing, both practically and in showing their love for him. He is in a Roman prison and dependent on others just so he can have food to eat. Their gift would've had a real and potentially life saving impact.

Yet even in his thanks he seems not to want to be a burden. It's as if here, and in the verses tomorrow, he is saying: 'You really didn't have to do this, because I have all I need in Christ...but I am so glad that you have!'

We see here how much of a man of faith Paul was. To declare that he 'can do all this through him who gives me strength' is to place all of his confidence in Christ alone, not in the clothes, or food, or safety, or money he may or may not have.

This confession is not so much here a declaration to be able to achieve great things (although perhaps an appropriate thing too), but is a declaration of God's hand to bring Paul through every circumstance of his life.

We also see here how Paul was a human being just like us. He has been through (and is currently going through) such incredibly difficult times. We saw in Chapter 2 how when it looked like Epaphroditus might die from his illness, Paul would have felt that as a sorrow *upon* sorrow. He has been through so much and still does not know if he will live or die. Their generosity has come like water in a desert.

He has learned to be content through big ups and downs. It would seem that Paul actually lived out the teaching he gives throughout this letter, fixing his eyes on Christ, putting others' above himself and rejoicing that whatever happens. Christ is with him and he will be with Christ into eternal life. Even so, he has still had to learn this through real, and often hard, life experiences.

We see that they have positioned themselves to be used by God to bless Paul in his life. Even in their troubles, they have acted like Christ in preferring others above themselves and the result is wonderful.

## **Questions**

Do I have faith that God can give you strength when you have plenty? Or when I have nothing at all other than him?

Where can I learn to be content in my circumstances?

Do I look to fast forward the real life experiences that God leads me through because I am not content without more money or security etc.?

What things that I lack stop me being content? Bring those to God and place him above them all.

Where could I be generous to someone? We have no idea what a blessing that gift could be. Who am I being this kind of blessing to?

Do I see it as weakness to need God's strength to get me through?

### **Actions**

Pray and thank God that he is near and that we can do all things through him who gives us strength.

Ask the Holy Spirit to show you the things that stop you being content. Bring those to God and place him above them all.

Invite The Holy Spirit to strengthen you today.

# DAY 26 - They are such a blessing

**Read Philippians 4:14-20**

**14** Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. **15** Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; **16** for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid more than once when I was in need. **17** Not that I desire your gifts; what I desire is that more be credited to your account. **18** I have received full payment and have more than enough. I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. **19** And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.

**20** To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Paul continues his thankfulness to them for their gift. We also see that this has not only happened recently since his imprisonment, but that they have been a blessing to him right from the moment they received the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

No wonder in 1:3-5 at the start of his letter Paul said:

**3** I thank my God every time I remember you. **4** In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy **5** because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now

Paul is thankful, but he also wants to say again that he is not after their money. As we saw yesterday, he has learned to be content in every situation. He here says that far from looking to get wealthy from them, he is looking for *their* 'account' to increase.

Some words of Jesus might help us here:

### **Read Matthew 6:19-21**

**19** "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. **20** But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. **21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.**

To use Jesus' words together with Paul's letter, it seems that Paul is grateful for the gift he has received, but is more interested in the treasure in heaven that they have received from their generosity.

He says their gift is pleasing to God and that God always meets the needs of those who live as Paul taught us to in chapter 2:1-11. This is not by his riches of money (although God can bless us that way), but by his riches in GLORY. Glory like we see in chapter 2:9-11.

### **Questions**

Do I trust God with my finances?

Am I more interested in treasure on earth or in heaven?

Are my finances a blessing to my church and to others?

Where could I grow in being generous with my time or talents?

### **Actions**

Pray and thank God for his blessings in our lives.

Invite God to speak into your finances and look (maybe as a family) at ways in which you could store up treasure in heaven rather than on earth.

# DAY 27 - Grace to all of you

## Read Philippians 4:21-23

**21** Greet all God's people in Christ Jesus. The brothers and sisters who are with me send greetings. **22** All God's people here send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar's household.

**23** The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.

The letter ends with showing the warmth and love that is shared between Paul and the Church in Philippi.

We also see, as we saw at the very beginning, his focus on Christ as the centre of their lives. They are God's people *in Christ*. This is as true for us as it was for them. We have become God's people in Christ Jesus. Not through our own efforts or by taking on the Old Testament Law, but simply receiving by faith the grace given to us in Christ. Our obedience that follows is essential, but was not the way we have been brought into relationship with God.

We also see how again, as he has so often throughout his letter (particularly in chapter 1), Paul speaks to them as a body of believers. His instruction here is to greet 'all God's people', No one is to be left out as they all share in God's grace. And Paul's blessing at the end is that grace would be with the spirit of every single person in the church.

We saw yesterday how much of a blessing this church is to Paul. There is no room here in this letter for pride to creep in. No one can truly have life to the full outside of the family of God, humbly loving and serving one another and living our lives with those who share in the grace of God, given in Christ and received through faith.



## **Questions**

Am I trying to live as a Christian without recognising my need to be part of the community of a Church?

Do I recognise my deep need to be actively connected into the family of God in a Church?

Am I playing my part in my church family, a place of privilege and responsibility?

Do I have good friends or a life group who I can share real life with?

## **Actions**

Ask God to show you where pride lives in your heart: places where you don't think you need anyone else.

Repent of those things. Humble yourself and turn to the truth. We need each other.

Think of one simple way that you could bless someone else in church this week...and do it!

# DAY 28 - We've only just begun

## Read Philippians 1:9-11

**9** And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, **10** so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, **11** filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.

This was Paul's prayer for the Philippians and it is our prayer today.

As we finish our look at this extraordinary letter, let us add our 'Amen' to this prayer with our hearts and actions.

## Actions

Read the book of Philippians (it won't take you that long!).

Pray and reflect on what God has begun to speak to you over these weeks.

Share that with someone and pray together that God will continue what he has started.

As Paul encourages us throughout the letter, turn those beginnings into actions and watch God's love grow more and more in our lives and in our church. Then we can shine like stars into the world around us. Amen.

## Next Steps

You could continue to **read Philippians**, maybe trying to memorise particular passages that have impacted you.

We've seen throughout this letter how Jesus truly is at the centre of everything. Spending some time now in **one of the Gospels** would be a great way to fix our eyes on Jesus and allow him to continue to speak to us.

If you've found the context of Paul's life or the Early Church interesting then you could **read the book of Acts** and see the accounts of the gospel spreading into the world. You could also **read 1 & 2 Thessalonians** which are written to the church in Thessalonica which was not far from Philippi.