Welcome everyone! My name is Mitch and I’m one of the pastors here. This morning I have the privilege of closing out our series on Philippians, and my hope for us all today, is that we would allow Paul’s letter to permeate our lives in a very deep and profound way. Would you pray with me?

Lord, this morning, as you quiet our hearts, would you open our eyes and ears to see and hear what it is you want to teach us today? Help us to leave the distractions at the door for the next 20-30 minutes and allow your word to take root in our lives. We pray this in your name, AMEN!

Well, as I said before, we’re wrapping up a four-week series on the book of Philippians. If you’re just joining us for the first time, you'll still be able to take plenty home with you today, but if you'd like to go back and catch up, our podcasts and video recordings are on the website. Here's the 30-second-fly-over:

Paul’s in jail – facing death. Now, you wouldn’t think this would be the most fitting time for him to write about joy, but that’s what he does! Paul so badly wants the people forming this new church to understand that real joy can exist in their lives - despite their circumstances. Let’s dive in.

In chapter 4, Paul gives five ways that we might find joy. We’ve already touched on the first one earlier in this series, so we’ll skim over this one quickly:

1) We find joy when people are reconciled.

Let’s read our first five verses:
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! I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you, my true companion (identity debate), 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.

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.

In a very basic sense, Paul wants the people worshiping together to be able to reconcile their differences. He knows that there needs to be gentle ACTION. In order to ACTUALLY help them “be of the same mind”, it may take more than simply speaking niceties to them, like “Thoughts and Prayers.”, which is often our easy way out on social media.

In order for our gentleness to be evident, according to Paul, it needs action!

Paul wants to see people being reconciled. What does that mean for us today? We’re not that different from those early churches. We’re broken people who need to find our common ground in Christ. And in order for us to not hinder God’s kingdom-work, we need to take steps of action to reconcile our differences!

2) We can find joy when we bring our anxieties to God in prayer..

The next two verses in our text are likely familiar:

Do 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 your minds** in Christ Jesus.

Let’s break that down a bit. Verse 6 is a massive IF and verse 7 is a gigantic THEN. First of all, verse 6:

> 6 Do not be anxious about anything,  
>    but in every situation,  
>    by prayer and petition,  
>    with thanksgiving,  
>    present your requests to God.

Paul is telling the people of Philippi to calm down gently. He says that there’s a formula to obtain peace. IF… you’re able to bring your anxieties, your worries, your cares to God the Father. THEN… God’s peace will guard your hearts and minds. Notice what Paul DOES NOT SAY: “present your requests to God and you’ll be happy!” He also DOES NOT SAY: “present your mess to God and he’ll make your life amazing!”

This peace, which is like no other, will guard us from the mess that we’re in. It will protect us like armor. Without God’s peace, we’re like worried little children… in a battle… in nothing but our long johns… In January! We won’t last long on our own! We’re helpless. Paul doesn’t say that God’s peace will CHANGE our situation. He’s saying that it will help protect the way we think, and the way we feel ABOUT our current situation!

“Don’t be anxious about anything…” Easier said than done, right? Research shows us that today 18.1% suffer from an anxiety disorder in the U.S. – that’s 40 million adults! That’s nearly one in five people are anxious at a diagnosable level. I’d be willing to bet 3 out of 5 of us experience anxiety.
symptoms from week to week. Sweaty palms, the classic over-analyzing of situations, sleep-deprivation, etc.

I, myself get anxious when I need to have difficult/confrontational conversations with people - especially people I care about! The build up to these conversations will completely hi-jack my thoughts. Paul is telling us to trade in our worry for peace. He not only tells us WHAT to do, but HOW to do it!

We Pray.
We Petition.
We ask for God’s mercy on our situation.
We beg him, repetitively.
But HOW WE DO IT is also critical, according to Paul: **WITH THANKSGIVING!**

Is this our undoing most times? Maybe we pray.. Maybe we pray A LOT! But can we honestly say that we’re praying from a thankful posture? Is gratitude the fuel that drives our prayer life?

“God, I know you’re busy, but I’m really stressed-out here. I need you to help me with my financial situation! School shopping is coming and I’ve already maxed out my Cabela’s card – can you please bail me out?”

If we can frame our dialogue with God from a thankful perspective, we honor God because it shows we truly believe what he’s capable of! We’re thanking him for ways he’s been evident in our past, present, and even future!

Moving on. Paul transitions into verse 7 by using the word for “and”, which can also be translated as “then”, which makes these verses a “cause and effect” relationship.

> *And the peace of God,*
which transcends all understanding, 
will guard your hearts and your minds 
in Christ Jesus.

Paul is very intentional to say that the peace that comes from God is unlike any other peace we’ve experienced. It’s not like peace on a hammock or on the deck of your cabin. It’s not like peace when all your bills are paid on time. It’s not even like the peace that comes when your favorite Netflix show releases its newest season! – IT’S SO MUCH MORE THAN THAT!

Paul is saying that God’s peace will change your entire life. God’s peace will rock your world, because it will calm the storm. It will guard your heart. It will guard your mind. They become guarded because they’re anchored to something MUCH BIGGER than the current situation or circumstance – your heart and mind are anchored to God: who IS PEACE.

3) We can find joy by choosing our thoughts and focus.

*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. *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.

Fill your mind with good things. Our lives are never void of influences. We CHOOSE what we subject ourselves to. Be it the television, the internet, social media, the bar crowd, the golf course, the swimming pool, or the woods. What we surround ourselves with WILL SHAPE US!
A few years ago we went to streaming tv shows - we cut out cable. The news was getting really hard to watch. We live in a culture that obsesses with tragedy and strife. I want my world filled with other things: laughter, adventure, music...

There are apps out there now that can track your screen-time on your phone. Most of us are terrified of those apps because we really don’t want to know the truth about how many hours our eyes are glued to our phones.

“Well, I might miss something big! Somebody might post something dramatic about their own life that I NEED TO KNOW! What if there’s been a couple more notifications since I put my phone in my pocket 6 minutes ago?”

I’m the first to admit, I’m fill my mind with a lot of POINTLESS things!

“You are who your friends are" or “you are what you eat”. If I wanted to be thinner, Boston Cremes and Monster aren’t going to get me there. If I want to be an expert mechanic, watching reruns of Grey’s Anatomy might not do it. If I want to be more like Jesus, more full of virtue, Paul has a solution: that we align ourselves with God’s character.

I should be focusing on what is TRUE: Creation, Beauty, Diversity, Who God is...
I should be focusing on what is NOBLE: Humility, Modesty, Hospitality, Generosity
RIGHT: Justice, Advocacy, Compassion,

The list goes on!

Our actions flow out of our thoughts. Paul says so, the field of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy says so, and I’m here to tell you, there are very few actions in this life that aren’t
sparked by a thought - Maybe with the exception of some adolescent boys, but that’s for another Sunday.

Paul ends his list by saying we need to PUT INTO PRACTICE the good things that we’ve learned! Focus and act! Joy is obtainable through reconciliation, through gratitude, through peace, and through right focus!

4) We can find joy in contentment.

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.

For this section, we should glance back to chapter one, just briefly, in order to frame this more completely:

In Chapter one, Paul is absolutely convinced that God was working THROUGH his situation for the advancement of the Gospel. Regardless of how this situation was going to end, God would be glorified, people would come to know Christ, and the word was being preached! From beginning to end of Philippians, Paul’s joy overflows through what seems to us, like a miserable set of circumstances!

No matter what Paul is facing, he makes it abundantly clear that he is content, because Christ being glorified is Paul’s focus. He has a rock-solid trust that God could bring good out of any circumstance. He even says in verse 12 that
he “…has learned the secret of being content in any and every situation.”

How many of us can say that? How many of us can say that no matter what we’re facing, we’re content – EVEN JOYFUL, because God is getting the glory.

Paul sets an incredible example of what our attitude should look like as we follow Jesus! This level of contentment BREEDS joy – our joy has the freedom to grow exponentially when we discover what contentment feels like in all situations.

So by the time we hit verse 13, we have probably all heard these words spoken - probably in some very unusual contexts.

Taking verses out of context, or plucking them out to suit our personal needs - isn’t wise - it may be done out of innocence, but it actually distorts our understanding of who God is.

\[I\ \textit{can do all this (all things) through him who gives me strength.}\]

Paul wasn’t thinking of a locker room prayer before a tournament. He wasn’t thinking about that time when we had an uncomfortable “break-up conversation” looming over our heads in high school. He CERTAINLY wasn’t thinking about me wrestling with a fear of public speaking. EEK

Whenever we flippantly use a verse to make us feel better about our own life, without understanding a little bit of what’s happening in that verse, chapter, book.. we run the risk of diluting or distorting the message Paul was intending to communicate.
YES, God is capable of anything - we believe he is all-powerful, but Paul is not talking about God giving you the ability to lift a car off yourself when you’re pinned under it in a ditch somewhere. That’s taking this verse WAY out of context.

Once again, Paul is pointing to GOD'S strength that has gotten him through everything, and regardless of the outcome, God will prevail! **The focus is on God, not Paul.** Paul’s commitment to the gospel goes beyond his circumstance, just like his joy. Whether in plenty or in want, Paul’s joy is NOT based on his situation.

5) Paul found joy in the generosity of others.

Now I know how that sounds. I might find joy in someone else’s generosity too! At least if that generosity is towards me. This last passage is another that is often misunderstood, or taken out of its original context. People are tempted to come away thinking that God will ALWAYS take care of their needs, no matter what. But that’s not what Paul means as he closes out his letter. Paul is so proud of his people in Philippi – they’ve responded in generosity more than once:

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.

Paul makes the distinction that he’s not sharing about his plight to squeeze money out of them. Paul’s not preaching a PROSPERITY GOSPEL - the kind in which “God will bless you more and more depending on how big of a check you write” - that’s a lie. That’s heresy!

God’s blessings are not determined by your year-end giving statement. God will supply all their needs BECAUSE of their FAITHFULNESS, just as God has supplied all of Paul’s needs.

God has been at work in Paul’s life through this church in Philippi and Paul wants to point that out to them! Not only are they doing the will of God by being generous, but they can trust that God will take care of all their needs too, as they remain faithful to him!

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

Ladies and gentlemen, no matter what is going on in your life this very day, God wants you to FIND JOY in your relationship with him. God wants us to align our perspectives with his - regardless of our circumstances. Paul says that when we do this, through thankful prayer, that our hearts and minds will begin to see things from God’s perspective. God is so much bigger than any problem you’re facing today – He wants you to bring them to his feet, surrender them, give thanks, find peace, contentment, and ultimately JOY IN WHO HE IS!

Let’s close in prayer:
God, I want to be the first to offer my anxieties to you this morning. You know my heart and you know the many things that weigh on me today. I thank you for the ways you look out for me, protect me, and work through even my toughest situations for the glory of your son, Jesus and good news that he’s at work in all of us. Help me to grab onto the joy that you offer each and every one of us. In your beautiful name we pray. AMEN.