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**Living in Peace**  
**Philippians 4:4-9**  
**November 27<sup>th</sup>, 2016, Jeff Germs**

Our last sermon in Philippians was based on three short verses, 4:1-3 where Paul exhorted the church in Philippi to help a couple of ladies who were squabbling with each other to get along and love each other, because their bickering was destroying the testimony of the church.

We noted that unity is not natural for us. We need to be very purposeful about maintaining unity. It won't happen if we don't work on it. Why do you think that is?

Here's what James wrote:

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**James 4:1-2 (NLT)**

***1 What is causing the quarrels and fights among you? Don't they come from the evil desires at war within you? 2 You want what you don't have, so you scheme and kill to get it. You are jealous of what others have, but you can't get it, so you fight and wage war to take it away from them. Yet you don't have what you want because you don't ask God for it.***

Now, I would think not many of us have let our jealousy or anger go so far as to kill someone or start a world war. The potential, however, is there if we let our anger or jealousy go unrestrained, which is why Jesus said if you hate someone you are guilty, in your heart, of murder.

What's the most basic cause of disunity? We think the world revolves around us. It's doesn't.

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Repeat after me, "***It's not about me.***"

**Our problem is that our default setting is, "Life revolves around me."**

We very naturally go through our days, weeks, months, and years thinking we are the main character in the story of, not only our own lives, but everyone else's, and they, including God, are the supporting characters in ours.

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The other problem is that **we can't change the default setting on our own.**

We can try. It may work for a few fleeting moments. For the most part, though, we tend to fall back to our natural default place of thinking it's about us. That means if someone takes the limelight away from *OUR* scene, we've got a problem. And as long as we continue living with this default setting we will never be happy. We will be forever looking at the faults of others thinking they are wrecking *OUR* story. And we will also blame God for wrecking *OUR* story if things don't go our way. Does that sound familiar? This is *MY* story God, and you are getting in *MY* way.

What happens when we allow those kinds of things to get in the way of our relationships with God and others? We lose our peace. We lose our joy.

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**It is impossible to have peace or joy when we are focused on self. GOD HAS CALLED US TO SOMETHING BIGGER AND MORE SATISFYING THAN A LIFE FOCUSED ON ME.**

The solution, as we have said many times, is that we need to give the Holy Spirit permission to come in and change our default setting so our hearts are aligned with the heart of God. We need an extreme makeover of our hearts. We need the Holy Spirit to do something that we cannot possibly do on our own.

We are going to take a look at Philippians 4:4-9. Always before digging into a passage it's important to remember the context of the passage we previously looked at because Paul doesn't write these different sections in isolation. The context from 4:1-3 is the church working hard to maintain unity. And now he tells us how to do it. Paul is going to say several statements that sound impossible. He uses some superlatives like 'always', 'everyone', 'everything', 'all'. And he says if we do these things we will have peace.

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#### Philippians 4:4-9 (NLT)

***4 Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice! 5 Let everyone see that you are considerate in all you do. Remember, the Lord is coming soon. 6 Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. 7 Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.***

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***8 And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise. 9 Keep putting into practice all you learned and received from me—everything you heard from me and saw me doing. Then the God of peace will be with you.***

There you go. Easy peasy.

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Paul sort of writes like it should be easy, but as we have noted in previous sermons, it's much harder than what it looks like on paper. Paul continually writes about the fact that we need to enter into training with Jesus. We need to unlearn a whole bunch of bad practices and beliefs, and build our faith muscles by constant training. At first we are not going to be very good at maintaining joy and peace. It will seem awkward for us.

Last week we talked about Euodia and Synteche who were having trouble getting along and it was defaming the name of Jesus. We talked about some other behaviours that can do harm to the reputation of Jesus, such as gossip and slander. And I said that some people don't even know when they are gossiping. It has become so normal for them. And to switch to positive gossip instead of negative gossip is very unnatural.

I'm going to call Dylan up to illustrate this and interview him about his guitar playing.

1. Were you born with the ability to play guitar? So, at first, would you say you were incompetent?
2. How did you discover you were incompetent? So, you probably didn't know you were incompetent until you tried to play.
3. How old were you when you first started playing?
4. In the beginning when you first started, did it feel awkward?
5. How was your gift uncovered?
6. How did you develop your gift?
7. When you play most chords now, do you have to think, "This finger goes here, and that finger goes there?"

Let's bring someone up who has never played guitar before and see if you can teach them to play.

Do you think you can actually teach him to play guitar if he is willing to put in the work?

That is sort of how it is with us and our spiritual growth.

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In order to grow we need to **uncover our UNconscious Incompetencies, or character flaws**. Let's call it what it is, "sin". We all have blindspots. Usually the way we discover our blindspots is by bumping into people. Sometimes we won't believe it when someone brings it to our attention. We get defensive. If bump into more people who tell us our blind spots, and we have any humility at all, and are sensitive to the Holy Spirit, we will eventually own them.

When we become aware of them **they will become Conscious Incompetencies**, or character flaws (sin). We become aware that we have a tendency to gossip or whatever. At this point it will be difficult to stop.

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Then, as you enter into training with Jesus and give him permission to change you, you will grow and those incompetencies will become **Conscious Competencies**. In other words, you can actually, at times, catch yourself and not gossip. You are still very aware of the temptation, but you don't give in as much.

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After a while, as you humbly and courageously continue training with Jesus and in community with other Jesus-followers, your **Conscious Competencies** will become **Unconscious Competencies**.

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You will find, in time, as you continue your apprenticeship with Jesus, that some of the sins you used to struggle with, no matter what it is, will no longer be a strong temptation to you. You will find that the temptation no longer has any hold on you. It doesn't matter what the sin is. It could be lust, or gossip, or greed, or anxiety, or fear or, (my wife's favourite sin) irritability, or whatever. As you allow Jesus to work in your heart he will move you closer to becoming like him.

None of this is natural for us. We need the power of the risen Jesus to work a change in our hearts. We need to go into training with him.

Before we go deeper into our Philippians passage let's take a quick look at Romans 8 because this is exactly what Paul was talking about here.

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**Romans 8:1–16 (NLT)**

***1 So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. 2 And because you belong to him, the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you from the power of sin that leads to death. 3 The law of Moses was unable to save us because of the weakness of our sinful nature. So God did what the law could not do. He sent his own Son in a body like the bodies we sinners have. And in that body God declared an end to sin's control over us by giving his Son as a sacrifice for our sins.***

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***4 He did this so that the just requirement of the law would be fully satisfied for us, who no longer follow our sinful nature but instead follow the Spirit. 5 Those who are dominated by the sinful nature think about sinful things, but those who are controlled by the Holy Spirit think about things that please the Spirit. 6 So letting your sinful nature control your mind leads to death. But letting the Spirit control your mind leads to life and peace.***

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***7 For the sinful nature is always hostile to God. It never did obey God's laws, and it never will. 8 That's why those who are still under the control of their sinful nature can never please God. 9 But you are not controlled by your sinful nature. You are controlled by the Spirit if you have the Spirit of God living in you. (And remember that those who do not have the Spirit of Christ living in them do not belong to him at all.)***

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***10 And Christ lives within you, so even though your body will die because of sin, the Spirit gives you life because you have been made right with God. 11 The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you. And just as God raised Christ Jesus from the dead, he will give life to your mortal bodies by this same Spirit living within you. 12 Therefore, dear brothers and sisters, you have no obligation to do what your sinful nature urges you to do.***

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***13 For if you live by its dictates, you will die. But if through the power of the Spirit you put to death the deeds of your sinful nature, you will live. 14 For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. 15 So you have not received a spirit that makes you fearful slaves. Instead, you received God's Spirit when he adopted you as his own children. Now we call him, "Abba, Father." 16 For his Spirit joins with our spirit to affirm that we are God's children.***

Here is the miracle of God that gives us hope. If you are a follower of Jesus, you have the power of the Holy Spirit of God living in you. The same power that raised Jesus from the dead lives in you. He will speak to you and let you know that your gossip, or irritability, or whatever is your besetting sin, is hurting the church and the reputation of Jesus and your relationships. The problem is that if you make a habit of ignoring him you will no longer recognize his voice. Your inner lawyer, as Paul Tripp calls it, will justify your toxic words and thoughts.

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When the Holy Spirit whispers to you that you ought not speak like that or think that way, your inner lawyer stands up and works at justifying your actions. You might argue, "It's not really gossip. I'm just sharing a prayer request." There are so many ways we can try to justify the things we do or say. The longer we stay on that road the quieter Jesus' voice gets until we can no longer hear him. We need to practice listening to Jesus. Jesus said, "***My sheep hear my voice.***" (John 10:27)

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**In order to grow we need to give the Holy Spirit, and those we trust, permission to show us our blind spots.** We need to uncover those things in our lives that get in the way of our relationships.

So, with all that background let's again look at some of these seemingly impossible imperatives Paul gives us Philippians 4:4-9.

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The first verse in this passage has to do with the joy of the Lord. As a matter of fact, Paul sort of gives what seems like an unreasonable command to **always** rejoice.

***4 Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice!***

How many of you can actually do this? The truth is, this imperative is not unreasonable. Paul is not calling us to a joy that is based on nothing.

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**God is not calling you to put on a happy face and pretend you are joyful**, when in fact your life is falling apart all around you. If he was doing that, he would be advocating training hypocrites. A hypocrite is a play actor. One who pretends that he is something he's not.

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Instead, **Paul is calling you to have a change of perspective that only God, through his Spirit can make for you, as you cooperate with Jesus.** And it's only with this change of mind affected by the work of the Holy Spirit in you that true and constant joy and peace is possible.

Remember, again, the context of this passage. Preceding this, Paul encouraged a couple of ladies to get along with each other because their bickering was damaging the reputation of the church and defaming the name of Jesus. What is Paul saying to these two ladies? He is telling them to have a change of perspective. What is really so important that they need to defame the name of Jesus by acting this way? Nothing! So, Paul says, "Stop it!"

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**4 Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice!**

The first verse in this passage is a command to always rejoice, and the last verse in this section, verse 9, is about Peace. These two verses (4 & 9) are what is called an *inclusio*. They sort of act like bookends that hold the rest of the passage together. Paul tells us in verse 4 to always rejoice – a humanly impossible task, and then in verse 9 he says if you do all of the things I just prescribed you will have both peace and joy, which are inextricably linked. You can't have one without the other. You don't search for peace and joy. They find you as you do these other things.

Peace and joy are inseparable. Paul used those two words together several times. Here's just one example.

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**2 Corinthians 13:11 (NLT)**

***11 Dear brothers and sisters, I close my letter with these last words: Be joyful. Grow to maturity. Encourage each other. Live in harmony and peace. Then the God of love and peace will be with you.***

So, again, joy and peace are inextricably linked. You can't have one without the other, and they are not found by pursuing them. They are a byproduct of living the way that Jesus said to live -- in harmony with others.

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**5 Let everyone see that you are considerate in all you do. Remember, the Lord is coming soon.**

In other words, we aren't pushing for our own way.

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**Seek first to understand — then to be understood.**

If your goal is always to make sure that you are understood you will continually face conflict. You will use fighting words. You will have an "us and them" mentality. And peace will not reign in your relationships, or your heart. If instead, you work hard at understanding others, especially those with whom you have conflict, you will defuse potential fights and quarrels. Jesus modelled this continually in the Gospels. Even though, he was God, he didn't abuse that authority or power.

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**Philippians 4 (NLT)**

**5 Let everyone see that you are considerate in all you do. Remember, the Lord is coming soon.**

I think likely what Paul means here is that one day, Christ will return and set everything straight. We don't have to try to push our way. We don't have to be right all the time. We don't have to get even. One of the great equalizing verses in the whole Bible is one that is quite well known. In Romans 12:19 Paul quoted from Deuteronomy 32:35.

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**Romans 12:19 (NLT)**

***19 Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say, "I will take revenge; I will pay them back," says the LORD.***

It's important that we take this verse to heart, to have it so much a part of our psyche that it affects our behaviour. We do not have to take matters into our own hands when it comes to getting our own way, or getting even, or pushing for our rights. That's God's job. He can do it with righteous indignation, with the perfect motive of love, something which we are extremely awkward at.

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## Philippians 4:4-9 (NLT)

***6 Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. 7 Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.***

How many of you would consider yourselves to be worriers? Be honest. It's very natural, but it's not the place in which God wants us to live. It's impossible to have joy and peace when we live in a paradigm of angst.

When we face trials, or conflict in our lives what happens? We get that sick feeling in the pit of our stomachs – you know what I'm talking about. And then depending on your personality, you will either go into a fight or flight mode. Meaning, you will either take matters into your own hands, or you will try to outrun the problem, or sort of curl up in the fetal position and pretend the problem isn't there.

What does Paul say to do? Give it to God. Sometimes we say things like, "Let go and let God." That's true, but it sounds a little simplistic. But, Paul tells us exactly how to give it to God. What's going on in your life right now that is hard for you and is causing you to be anxious? 1. Pray about it. Tell God what you need. 2. Watch for his answers and then 3. thank him.

As we tell him our needs and watch for his answers, it lifts our eyes to him. What will that do in our hearts? It will build our trust relationship with your heavenly Father. Whatever the trouble is, give it to God, thank him, and he will give you a peace that surpasses all understanding and it will guard your heart and your mind. That's a promise from God's Word that we can count on.

And you may say, "But you don't understand, my problem is impossible. There is no way I can humanly overcome this. My problem is greater than other problems." You might be right. You may have a big problem that has you tempted to live in disappointment and self-pity. And it might be bigger than you can handle. But, we all have a choice as to how we will face those disappointments.

How many of you have heard the story of Nick Vujicic? He was born with no arms and no legs. Talk about getting the short end of the stick. He started life from a huge deficit. He was, of course, tempted to live in self-pity and ask God, "Why me?" And I he did for a while, but his parents supported him and encouraged him to rise above his challenges and go to school and make friends and trust that God would use his life with his limitations. Against insurmountable odds Nick Vujicic is living a very full, satisfying, joy filled life with half a body. And he doesn't complain about his shortcomings anymore.

We don't have to live lives of defeat. We can jump in, despite our shortcomings, despite our deficit and entrust it all to God. We can give all our worries in prayer to our Father who loves us unconditionally, live our lives with gratitude, and he promises to give us inconceivable joy and peace.

You are not going to get it right all the time. None of us are good at this. You will need to practice. Be okay with failing. But as you work your faith muscles, you will grow. The peace will come. That's a promise from the God who always fulfills his promises.

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## Philippians 4:4-9 (NLT)

***8 And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise.***

This is just common sense. If, when trouble comes your way you spend your time thinking about the problems, asking why bad things always happen to you, and thinking that you will never be able to overcome, what's going to happen? You will stay wallowing in the muck and mire of self-pity. The problems will be magnified, bigger than they really are, and you will lose perspective. Consequently, God, in your eyes, will get smaller and smaller until you can never imagine him being big enough for you.

If, on the other hand, you do what Paul prescribes here, the opposite will happen.

***<sup>8</sup> And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise.***

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***“Don’t show God how big your problems are. Show your problems how big your God is.”***

The problems we have are nothing compared to how big and good our God is. I'm not saying that God is going to make everything in your life go the way you want it to. We live in a broken world where bad things happen to good people, but we can invite him to change our perspective so we learn to trust him no matter what the outcome. God is big enough to handle everything. He is not thrown off by our problems.

Living like this is not natural. It takes training.

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***<sup>9</sup> Keep putting into practice all you learned and received from me—everything you heard from me and saw me doing. Then the God of peace will be with you.***

Practice these things. Practice trusting God by being gentle, humble, and reasonable towards those you disagree with. We are not the main characters in the story of life with everyone else, including God, playing supporting parts. Whatever you are going through bring it first to God in prayer, look for his answers, and then thank him. Don't focus on your problems and think that you can't have peace and joy until all your problems are removed. God has bigger purposes for us than our comfort.

That doesn't mean you won't have to take some action. It means you leave the outcome to him on matters that are out of your control and you don't try to manipulate events in your favour when others will be hurt by the outcome. Trust God. Give everything to him in prayer and he promises to give you peace that is beyond anything you can understand.



**Living in Peace**  
**Philippians 4:4-9**  
**Week of November 20, 2016**

**Objective of this study:** To understand how to live with peace and joy - no matter what.

[Remember, the main goal of each Growth Group is to allow God's Word to change your heart so that others would see Jesus in you and be likewise changed to be like him. He wants to change the world through us]

**Worship (5 – 10 minutes)**

1. Sing a song or two of praise and thanksgiving to God.
2. Spend five minutes in silence asking God to prepare your heart for how he wants to speak to you.
3. After the five minutes have someone interrupt the silence and read **Psalm 23** meditatively to the group. Pause after each phrase letting God speak to you.

**Welcome**

When or where do you feel the most peace?

[It's really important when doing this study that we each think about ourselves specifically and ways we need to grow, not how Christians in general need to grow. Do the hard work of letting the Holy Spirit speak to *your* heart.]

**Word (30-45 minutes)**

1. What stood out from the sermon?
2. Read Phil. 4:4-9.
  1. Look for all the **superlatives** in this passage. [*superlative sə'pɜrlədɪv*]
    - 1 of the highest quality or degree: a superlative piece of skill.
    - 2 Grammar (of an adjective or adverb) expressing the highest or a very high degree of a quality]
  2. How attainable do Paul's instructions feel to you?
  3. Which one(s) stand out to you and why? (Make sure everyone who wants to has a chance to weigh in.)
3. Read Romans 8:1-16.
  1. Break into two groups. One group look carefully what God does. The other group look at what we, as Jesus-followers do.

**Work (30-45 minutes)**

1. What is currently tempting you to lose peace?
2. How do you think the Holy Spirit would ask you to deal with your situation?
3. Break up into smaller groups to pray for each other.