

Philippians 4:4-9 - 3 Dominant Instructions

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[0:00] Grab a Bible and turn to Philippians chapter 4. Philippians chapter 4. So it's page 1180, if you've got a church Bible.

1180 Philippians chapter 4. So we are right at the end of our series in the book of Philippians. And so let me pray for us and ask the Lord's help as we look at his word together.

Let me pray. Father, we want to pray just especially now that you might help us as we look at your words. We don't just want to understand it with our brains.

We want to be moved with our hearts to love you and trust you. We're very conscious of our need of your work by your spirit.

That he who inspired these words might now be at work even in our own hearts. To teach us to love you and trust you as we should. Pray that you'd help us to understand them rightly and truly, these words.

[1:04] And please be with us, we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen. Let me read to you from verse 4 down to verse 9.

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again. Rejoice. Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything.

But in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your request to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

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. Okay, so if you are willing to accept that verses 10 down to the end of verse 23, we covered largely in our overview of the book.

[2:21] So verse 10 to 20 are basically Paul describing his thankfulness to the Philippians for their gift to his ministry. If you're prepared to accept that we dealt with those verses in our overview, then what I want us to do is spend our time in verses 4 to 9 and focus on those.

So six verses in 25 to 30 minutes might sound manageable, but there is lots here. So to help us navigate just these few verses, and I know there are only a few of us here this evening, so I'm expecting some interaction as well from you.

There are three dominant instructions in these verses. Okay, so there are lots of small instructions, but there are three dominant ones, and the others are sort of gathered around those imperatives in the passage.

So the three dominant instructions are, what are the three dominant instructions in the passage?

Yes, you see, Jen, that was very wise.

See, if you get in there early, you get the easy one, right? So rejoice, yeah, that's the first one. It's a negative, the next one.

[3:32] Do not be anxious. Well done, Sam. Final one. The instruction to pray, no.

So that comes on the back of the don't be anxious one, yeah. I'm going to say the third one you're going to find out as we go along, okay? So I'll keep you in suspense, right?

So let's start with the first one. Rejoice, rejoice. Let's read verses 4 and 5 again. Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again. Rejoice. Let your gentleness be evident to all.

The Lord is near. Now, obviously, rejoicing is so important that Paul says it twice. Rejoice, rejoice. But this is not just, it's not an instruction to be happy, right?

This is not Paul channeling his inner Bob Marley. No, this is not, don't worry, be happy. That's not the vibe here. Rather, this is rejoice in the Lord always, okay?

[4 : 35] See, in other words, Paul is telling the Philippian church that whatever is happening in your life as an individual, however difficult things are for you as a church right now with the persecution that you're facing, there is and there always will be a sufficient cause in the Lord for you to rejoice.

And verse 5 spells out further what this rejoicing will look like. So, interestingly, rejoicing in the Lord is not always be singing songs of praise, or it's not always be smiling even through the toughest seasons of the Christian life.

Rather, rejoicing is, verse 5, letting your gentleness be evident to all. The display of joy is gentleness.

Gentleness, gentleness that is founded on the reality, in verse 5, that the Lord is near, or literally the Lord is at hand. In other words, in Philippians 4, verses 4 and 5, the happy Christian, the rejoicing Christian, is the Christian who remembers that the Lord is returning, and that his return is closer now than it has ever been at any other point.

And remembering that looks like, remembering that, rejoicing in that, looks like an absence of harshness, of judgmentalism, of anger, of frustration, because rejoicing in the Lord who is returning soon is seen in gentleness.

[6 : 04] Oh, Nick! See, Nick has nailed the third instruction, put into practice.

Well done, Nick. I'm glad you found that, but you have literally spoiled the surprise in my talk, Nick. So, there you go. Everyone now is zoning out. Anyway, this instruction to rejoice, displayed in gentleness, is obviously challenging, isn't it?

I think it is my observation, both of others and also an observation of my own personal Christian life, that actually, this does not come easily, does it?

Rejoicing displayed in gentleness is not necessarily the forte, particularly, might I say, of older men. Being a grumpy old man is definitely a thing, isn't it?

I'm not going to look at anybody, you can't, Sam, that's fine. It is a thing, isn't it? And it's a thing in church. And it happens, says Paul, to Christian men who forget that the Lord is returning soon, and that therefore there is sufficient cause to rejoice in every season, because the Lord is on his way.

[7 : 17] And men who forget that become desperate, don't they? So the women who forget it. We become desperate and hurried. We are always looking to make a point to younger people, who don't know as well as we know, and so we're trying to point it out to them in a hurry and with a lack of gentleness.

This is the older man, isn't it? Or woman who is always telling people how many years of experience they have. Always pointing out the faults in everything. There was an older gentleman in a church I was in a number of years ago who was like this.

He seemed to think that it is his role at church to berate younger people for their lack of seriousness in the Christian life, particularly in the way that they raised their children, the way that they prayed or the way that they spoke, not smoked, but spoke.

That would be bad, wouldn't it? But spoke in small groups. And I don't think the problem wasn't that he was wrong in his observations. I think he was often right in his observations. He had a point.

His problem was, though, and I think this is my problem too at times, is he thought that it was his grumpy interjections of instruction that would be the means that the Lord would use to make these people more serious about the Christian life.

[8 : 26] And so that was a mistake, wasn't it? He was not gentle and he was robbed of joy. And so instead, this instruction is to rejoice with a gentleness that grasps this imminent return of Christ when everything will be resolved.

And it's not just simply that, you know, most things are way above our pay grade to resolve, aren't they? They belong to the Lord Jesus. They're in the realm of Christ will sort it out when he comes again. But also it's grasping that it's a gentle rejoicing spirit, which is the means that the Lord uses to bring himself glory and correct other people.

So the steady Christ is returning. God is good. The gospel is true. Praise the Lord faithfulness. It's that that the Lord uses for his glory and the good of those around us.

So, brother, sister, don't be impatient. Don't be grumpy. Don't be a harsh older person that the devil would love to make you into. But remember, the Lord is at hand.

Rejoice. Say it again. Rejoice. Rejoice. And do it with gentleness. The second instruction then is there at the beginning of verse 6. And it is no easier, I don't think, than the first one.

[9 : 34] It is don't be anxious. Verses 6 and 7. Let me read those to you. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your request to God.

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Again, those qualifiers don't make it any easier, do they?

Don't be anxious about anything. Instead, in every situation, he says. Rather, instead of being anxious, we should be praying, he says.

Praying with thanksgiving and requests, which will give us an inexplicable peace. The peace of God, which transcends all understanding, which is beyond grasping, beyond understanding, will guard our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus.

When you think about this, this is a really lovely command, isn't it, of Paul? Because he's not only telling us, listen guys, don't be anxious. He's giving you the tool to obey the command.

[10 : 40] Saying, essentially, listen, don't be anxious. Instead of being anxious, pray. Prayer is the opposite of anxiety. Prayer is the opposite of worry. Of course, it's true, isn't it?

Anxiety here is more than just a sort of sensible awareness of trouble. It is a taking on of responsibility to itself, which it never really should have. The anxiety of a child who feels like they don't have any parental support.

It's the fear of a soldier who feels like they have no commanding officer. It's the fear of a builder who feels like there's no architect with any kind of design. But, of course, as Christians, we know we have a father in heaven.

We have a commanding officer. There is an architect of history. And so we should not be anxious and take on those responsibilities to ourselves. But we should turn to God. Because he is Lord of all.

This problem is yours, Lord. This problem is in your world. This relationship breakdown that we're experiencing belongs to your world, Lord. You know what to do.

[11 : 40] This health problem is here, Lord. And you know that I am not sovereign over that. You are, Lord. I leave it with you. And Paul says that as we do that, as we pray like that, we find that this supernatural peace of God, a peace that cannot be explained by the world, comes over us.

Now, of course, you know that to be true, don't you? I am sure that if you've been a Christian for any length of time, you have probably experienced it. I remember a few years ago when we were living in Liverpool, it was a particularly stressful period of life in the church.

There were lots of things going on all at the same time. We had issues with the building. We had issues with the staff. We had church members who were sick and dying. We had some financial struggles in the church as well. And, you know, as you sit and think about them, you can just feel your heart rate going up.

You can feel this kind of wave of worry and anxiety coming over you. And the only thing I could do was pray. Lord, these are your troubles. These are beyond the realms of my gifts and my abilities. I can't fix this. I can't sort this. I'm a passenger of your providence in this. You are the driver, Lord. I trust you. And you can almost sense, just even as you say those words, this peace of the Lord washing over you.

[12 : 54] God has got this. That became a bigger thought than the worries themselves. A guy called Raymond Brown, who wrote a commentary on the book of Hebrews, calls prayerlessness, the act of not praying, practical atheism.

And, of course, it's right, isn't it? The action of not believing in God is not praying. And the fruit of not praying is anxiety. I think it's worth saying that we live in a time where anxiety is at epidemic levels, especially amongst young people.

I've been reading this book called *The Anxious Generation* by a guy called Jonathan Haidt. Not as in H-A-T-E, but as in, well, I think it's what? I think I've supposed to put it down here somewhere. I don't know. H-A-I-D-T. That's how you spell his name. And he charts anxiety, kind of clinical anxiety in different age groups in the U.S.

And the statistics are similar for the U.K. So that for 18 to 25 year olds and those younger, there has been a massive rise in anxiety since 2010. So let me, I think I've got a chart here.

[13:58] Look at that. This is the prevalence of anxiety in the U.S. What happened in 2010, you think, that led to that?

Sorry? COVID? No, so that's later. That's 2020. Sorry? By the recession. So it's after the recession. I think Lucy knows. So in 2010, Facebook bought Instagram. And Instagram went massive.

And smartphones were issued with front-facing cameras. And so Jonathan Haidt says that there's a link between that. That it's basically led to an epidemic in anxiety amongst young people, which is of massive, massive proportion.

So you can see just how that chart is going up and up and up. And what does Paul say to all that in Philippians chapter 4? Well, he doesn't just yell in the face of the panic-attacking teenager, don't be anxious.

[15:09] He says instead, pray, pray. Turn it to the Lord. Seek from the Lord what you'll never find in the approval of others. Come to him for the assurance that you belong, for the affirmation that you crave.

So let me challenge you, whatever your age, included, that if we find ourselves scrolling on social media for more time than we are praying, we can expect to be anxious.

Because prayer brings peace as we hand over to God what was always his. Okay, third and final instruction, which Nick tells us via Zoom, is put into practice.

It's there at the end of verse 9. So let me read verses 8 and 9 to you. Put into practice. There's the instruction.

Put into practice. Specifically, put into practice what they've seen Paul do. And the thing that's described above has been true, noble, right, pure, lovely, and admirable, excellent, and praiseworthy.

[16:34] It's not just a general instruction, is it? But it is an instruction to put into practice how they've seen Paul do those things. When I was a teenager, maybe I was a slightly precocious teenager probably, but I printed out these verses with the exception of verse 9, just verse 8, and put it on a sign and blue-tacked it to the television, right?

So, you know, this whatever is true, whatever is noble. I think I did that in the hope that my sister would watch less Brookside so I could watch more sports on the TV, right? I think that's what I was really aiming for.

But I don't actually think that's particularly what's in mind here. It's not a general, if this is a praiseworthy thing, you know, if this is like England winning the ashes, then you can watch it. But if it's Brookside, you can't. It's not that. It's more that there's a specific shape to these true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, and praiseworthy things.

And the shape is Paul's behavior, right? You see Paul doing true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, and excellent things in Philippians.

[17:43] And the Philippians are to put that into practice. So whatever they've seen Paul do. So I wonder, just for a moment, with the person next to you, perhaps, you can scan through the letter and just look at praiseworthy things that Paul has been doing in the letter to the Philippians.

Don't take ages over it, but just skim over the words and have a look for some praiseworthy things that Paul is doing. I've got a long list here, and then you can see how many of them that we get the same.

So just have a quick scan through and put your finger on them, and then we can talk about them in a moment. Okay, go on then. Let's shout some of these out to me.

Excellent and praiseworthy things that Paul is doing in the letter to the Philippians. He's praying for them. Yes. Praying with joy.

He is humble. Yeah. Where were you looking particularly for? Yeah. Yes. Yes. So he's humble like Christ. Yeah. Imitating Christ's humility.

[18:48] Anything else? I'm sorry. Yes. He's acknowledging Jesus Christ as Lord. Yeah. More things in chapter one.

Any other letters? Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes.

Yes. Yes. Yes. So he's living with a confidence that God finishes what he started. Yeah. Yeah.

That's a praiseworthy thing to think about.

That God finishes what he started. It's great. Yeah. Yeah. what about his love for gospel partners so this sense of partnership in the gospel which he really delights in loves yeah anything else yeah

yeah yes yeah so he reminds us to think about the lord jesus his life death in our place the incarnation yeah he tells us to um oh go on lucy he boasts in jesus and not himself yeah yeah and what was claire's one sorry he loves them yeah yeah what about this thing about um not being put off by people who are doing things out of envy and rivalry yeah so how he deals with people who are envious and full of rivalry he just rejoices that the gospel is being preached he seems to be able to find the good doesn't he to rejoice in even when people are out to get him he lives for christ so that dying is gain yeah he sacrificially serves he invests in eternal joy above temporary joy he's more interested in the joy that he will have when he meets the lord jesus than he is in the comforts of this life he's pouring himself out for others this is an interesting one he he is willing to receive the support of others his name so he he delights in epaphroditus's visits and in his support of him and at the philippian church's support of others yeah some of us aren't very good at accepting help i say that about myself as much as anybody that's the thing he does puts no confidence in his flesh considers everything a loss compared to knowing christ he presses on knowing that he's not yet perfect but that one day the lord jesus will meet him and everything will be finished and completed he keeps the eternal goal in sight he values gospel unity above personal preferences now i'm sure there are more right but you get the idea paul is saying listen put into practice what you have seen or received or heard from me and because those are things that are true and noble and right and pure and lovely and i think then there's a sort of implicit warning in these verses isn't it isn't there that you you become like those that you think about okay so if you spend most of your time and your energy reading and thinking about politics you become a politician right always maneuvering being economical with the truth seeking power and influence if you spend your time thinking about those who have wronged you you become bitter seeking personal justice all the time if you spend your time thinking about the perfect home or the perfect body or the perfect outfit or the perfect wedding whatever it is you become shallow and comparative and materialistic if you spend most of your time thinking about conspiracy theories or philosophies then you become introverted and obsessive lost in your own mind

but if you think about the lord if you think about the example of saints who've gone before us like the apostle paul the lives of men and women who've lived for jesus well then you become like them says paul so do that and what will happen if we follow that well then he says the peace of god will be with you so repeat isn't it of the peace of god just like it was with paul i don't know when you do this if you drive on the motorway the most relaxing way to drive on the motorway is what to find someone who's going a sensible speed and follow them right and the stress is lifted from you then isn't it because the decisions are taken away from you all you have to do is follow and that's what paul is saying as he follows christ you know paul what should i do about these people who are being so unkind to me don't worry follow me i know what to do rejoice in the gospel going forwards you know paul i've got this big decision to make about what i should do with my life where i should invest my ambitions and my dreams don't worry follow me as i follow christ and it will all become clear paul i've messed up my life is full of failed projects and patterns of sin don't worry i'm following jesus follow me it will all become clear put into practice whatever you have seen received or heard from me and the god of peace will be with you well any comments or questions before i pray and then we sing our closing hymn any thoughts go on liz yeah yeah yeah is this is this just me but i wonder whether we think about um and maybe this is because the way we've been taught but we think about learning truths and then moving on from them don't we so we think there's a certain set of basic truths about the christian gospel that we need to learn and then we move on from them but actually the christian life is not like that is it the christian life is about the repetition of basic truths so that we're increasingly shaped by them so i don't think there's much in philippians 2 about the person of the lord jesus that you you probably don't know already about the incarnation and what jesus has done but it is the repetition of that and the ongoing learning of it which shapes you isn't it to be that kind of person yeah that's really helpful yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah amen yeah that i yeah fighter i was so helped by that as well just being reminded that the it's not just because some people tell you don't be anxious and it's really it's quite that's quite difficult to say it's quite a burden but actually to be told pray that thing that you're anxious about take it to the lord

[27 : 32] pray and then the peace of god will come yeah it's great yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah well let me pray for us and then we'll sing our closing hymn heavenly father we want to pray that you might help us to rejoice in the lord always we pray that we might be gentle knowing that the return of the lord jesus is not far away pray lord that we'd be those joyful christians who with

great gentleness live as if christ is coming any moment we pray that you might help us to turn to you in prayer instead of worrying we worry about many things lord but you have them all under your control give us that great peace which transcends all understanding and lord we we think about lots of things too lots of things going through our minds and they shape us so lord pray that we might increasingly be shaped by the truth of your word of who you are what you're like that we might ponder on and consider the lives of those who followed you and that we might put those things into practice we pray whatever's true or noble or right or pure or lovely or admirable anything excellent or praiseworthy help us to think about and put those things into practice we pray so that your peace might be with us in jesus name amen