

# Philippians Sermon Series: An Exploration of Christian Joy

## Sermon-based Small Group Guide - Week of Sunday, March 9<sup>th</sup>

Sermon Title: From Joy to Peace

Scripture Texts: Philippians 4:2-23

### Welcome

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Greet everyone as they arrive and check in with one another. Provide refreshments if possible.

### Discussion and Prayer

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This is a long passage of scripture. As you read it, think through what John had to say about each section of the text.

Read Philippians 4:2-23

What do you remember from the sermon? Share a main point or illustration.

(Spend no more than 10 minutes total here and then move on to focus on two of the main points.)

Focus on versus 4-7

Pray FIRST!

Rejoice!

Stop worrying

Present your requests to God

<p><b>Read the attached article on group prayer <u>before</u> your small group meets this week.</b></p>
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**Please spend some time praying together.**

(You might want to talk first about how you will prayer together. Discuss the format below and highlight main points from the attached article about group prayer. Or, read this article together if groups members have not read it ahead of your meeting.)

Use the following format for your group prayer:

Pray your requests instead of telling them to one another and support each other's prayers.

1. Start with a minute of silence to allow everyone time to think about one thing they are worried about.
2. One person prays a request – tell God what you are worried about.
3. Give space for others to add to this prayer – remember to rejoice, be thankful, and receive God's peace.
4. Repeat steps 2 & 3 until all requests have been expressed.
5. Conclude with a prayer of thanksgiving and rejoicing.

Focus on versus 8-9

At the Men's Breakfast on Tuesday, one of the points made by Bill Robinson was that good leadership encourages people to live by a set of values rather than by a set of rules. John suggested that verses 8-9 are the values that should shape our lives as Christians.

What are some rules the world perceives that Christians have to follow?

What are some rules we put on ourselves?

How would your life be different if you were living by values rather than rules?

Go to page 2 for an application activity . . .

## **Application**

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Allow some time for group members to do the following application activity independently.

The following list is from various versions of verse 8. They are adjectives that describe things of value.

1. Circle ONE value that you'd like to focus on this week.

<b>Admirable</b>	<b>Authentic</b>	<b>Beautiful (not ugly)</b>	<b>Best (not worst)</b>	<b>Compelling</b>
<b>Excellent</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Gracious</b>	<b>Honorable</b>	<b>Lovely</b>
<b>Noble</b>	<b>Praiseworthy</b>		<b>Pure</b>	<b>Reputable</b>
<b>Right</b>	<b>Things to Praise (not curse)</b>		<b>True</b>	<b>Virtuous</b>

2. Write a definition for the adjective you chose:

3. Examples of things of value that can be described by this adjective:

4. How will you pursue this value this week?

Return to group discussion - Share what value you will each focus on this week.

## **Review**

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If you have time, talk about one thing from Philippians that has impacted your life.

If you don't have time to review in your group today please spend time on your own reflecting back over this scripture, sermons and group discussions. How has Christ changed you through it?

## **Remember**

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“Summing it all up, friends, I'd say you'll do best by filling your minds and meditating on things true, noble, reputable, authentic, compelling, gracious – the best, not the worst; the beautiful, not the ugly; things to praise, not things to curse.”

Philippians 4:8 (The Message)

## **The Art of Group Prayer**

Making your small group prayer time meaningful.

By JoHannah Reardon

We wrapped up our small group as we usually do, with a time for everyone to share their prayer requests. After we closed in prayer, Tom approached my husband and me. He was considering dropping out of our small group because he felt overwhelmed by the prayer requests. It seemed to him as though everyone's problems were insurmountable, and although we'd been praying for the same things for months, it didn't seem as though anyone's life was getting any better.

Tom's comment was a wake-up call about the way we handled the prayer time in our small group. My husband and I did some soul and Scripture searching to find out what we might be doing wrong. Nowhere in Scripture did we find prayers for Sally's arthritis, Mark's unruly children, or Bonnie's rotten work conditions. The prayers in the Bible were powerful and life-changing, full of God's power and glory.

Consider Paul's prayer in Ephesians 1:16-23. In fact, read it aloud with feeling:

I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

Wow! Such a prayer puts arthritis, unruly children, and rotten work conditions in perspective.

So should we ignore our problems and pretend they don't exist? Not at all. Instead, we should transform them by putting them into the bigger context of what God wants to do in our lives. We can still take the prayer requests, but consider praying for them in the following ways.

### **Make Them God-Centered**

When you pray, remember who you are talking to. You have been given the privilege of coming before the creator of the universe. This is the God who made everything that lives or has its being, and he has given you the honor of bringing requests before him. That's why so many teachers tell us to start our prayers with adoration. When we tell God how great, powerful, and magnificent he is, it reminds us that he truly is those things. It gives us a sense of awe and expectancy that something great could come out of this conversation we are having with the one who can do anything.

Paul spent over half of his prayer in Ephesians 1 extolling God's virtues. Scholars agree that when Paul wrote this book, he was in prison. He could have listed a litany of prayer requests that would have made ours pale in comparison, but instead he focused on who God is. Surely the power of that prayer carried him farther than any listing of complaints. It also showed the Ephesians how to pray victoriously in the midst of whatever they were facing.

### **Make Them Praise-Filled**

Paul started his prayer by saying, "I have not stopped giving thanks ... " He'd learned that the key to praying is not to focus on a list of troubles, but to praise God for what he has done. How can we do that? How can we give thanks in everything, as Paul later admonished us to do in his letter to the Thessalonians?

To do that, we have to trust that God knows what he's doing. Sally has to be able to say, "Thank you, God, for my arthritis. I don't get why I have to have it, but you do, so I'm going to trust you with it. I'd be delighted if you'd take it away, but if not, I trust you will use it for good in my life."

Mark has to say, "Thank you for my unruly children. They are a gift from you, and I know you will equip me with wisdom to know how to help them. It may be a bumpy road, and they may have to go through some hard times before they learn their lessons, but I'm trusting that you will bring them into a loving relationship with you."

Bonnie must learn to say, "Thank you, Lord, for my job. You led me there, so I'm trusting that you want to use me with my coworkers, and that you will equip me to do this job well. If you are leading me elsewhere, I trust that you will make that clear, too. Teach me what you want me to learn through this difficulty."

### **Make Them Life-Changing**

Tom was frustrated with our prayer time because it seemed nothing ever changed. Maybe that's because we weren't praying for the right change. I've noticed that the vast majority of our prayers are for God to change our circumstances. Maybe God doesn't want to change our circumstances. Maybe he wants to change us.

That doesn't mean he won't ever change our circumstances. I have seen God supply needs, open up opportunities, and heal people in incredible ways. But I've also spent years praying for something to change that never does. That should be my first clue that I may not be praying for the right thing.

Looking at our three people again may give us a clue as to how to think about this. If Sally has been praying for God to heal her arthritis for years, and he hasn't done it, she should probably focus on how he wants to use it in her life. Maybe God wants her to start a support group for other arthritis sufferers. Or possibly he wants her to express more compassion for others who are suffering, by praying for them or sending money to a research organization that is looking for a cure. Perhaps he just wants to get her attention—and as C.S. Lewis said, pain is his megaphone.

Mark needs to pray for his children the way Paul prayed for the Ephesians—that God would give them the Spirit of wisdom and revelation so that they may know him better. He needs to pray that his children would know the hope to which God has called them, their glorious inheritance, and God's incomparably great power. Mark needs to pray these things for himself, too, so that he will be able to model such a walk with God for his children.

Bonnie should honestly express to God her frustrations with her job. If she has a possibility of changing jobs, she needs to pray for God's confirmation and wisdom about doing so. She needs to get the advice of other godly people to see their perspectives. If she has done all that, and feels that God wants her to stay in her job, she needs to ask him what he wants to accomplish in and through her. Bonnie should ask God to change her perspective and give her joy. After all, if Paul could find joy while sitting in a prison cell, Bonnie can probably find joy in her job if she lets God open her eyes to it.

Our small group prayers changed after Tom complained. We realized that we were treating prayer as a complaint session, when in reality it is an incredible opportunity to gain the wisdom, direction, and power of the King of kings who rules all time and places.

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