

Stay in the Traces:

How the Gospel Infuses Joy for the Mission

Philippians 4:1-9 // November 27, 2022

Welcome and Intro:

4 So then, my dearly loved and longed for brothers and sisters, my joy and crown, in this manner stand firm in the Lord, dear friends.

2 I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to agree in the Lord. **3** Yes, I also ask you, true partner, to help these women who have contended for the gospel at my side, along with Clement and the rest of my coworkers whose names are in the book of life. **4** Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! **5** Let your graciousness[b] be known to everyone. The Lord is near. **6** Don't worry about anything, but in everything, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. **7** And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

8 Finally[c] brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable—if there is any moral excellence and if there is anything praiseworthy—dwell on these things. **9** Do what you have learned and received and heard from me, and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

In Early American history, prior to LUXURIES like interstates and backroads, traces were the common highways.

- A trace was a path that horse drawn wagons would travel.
- Over time, as more traveled down the path, a good foundation would be laid, thus making the route, albeit bumpy at times, the best way towards the destination.
- A good driver would put their wheels to the path, allow the horse to pull them, and keep the wagon in the trace.
- To 'jump the traces' is to fight against the very place you should be going, and you jump off the path.

1846 - Donner Party. They Jumped the trace for a perceived easier path.

Paul is writing the church to stay in the traces.

- This is coming from a guy that put the wagon wheel in the lane and didn't veer to the right or to the left.
- History of church planted in Philippi - Acts 16

Just a side note:

- Look around this room today:
 - We've middle, upper, lower class, we have caucasian, african-american, asian, latinx
 - Afghans and Ukranians sitting in the same rows and in the same connect groups as those from Leicester and Burnsville.

On the surface, nothing at first glance makes the casual bystander look at the church and say 'yeah....that makes sense that they all do life together.' Nothing. **Or shall I say, nothing but the gospel.**

- **NOTHING BUT THE GOSPEL** unites us at the most fundamental level and joyfully sustains us throughout this life.
- And in our mission together, that gospel becomes our greatest aim and adoration.
- **The mission of God is our trace. It's our path. Our road we journey along, together. In unity.**

But Paul warns us: there's a subtle slope that will cloud your vision and disrupt your unity. It will knock you off the path. That's why he says over and over...you have to STAND FIRM.

Stand firm is an encouragement he's given the church in Corinth, Colossae, Galatia, Ephesus, and Thessalonica.

Why the reminder to stand firm?

Because jumping the traces when the road gets bumpy for a perceived easier path is more subtle than we think.

Today, I want to propose 3 Resolutions from Philippians 4 to keep us from jumping the traces. 3 things in this text to keep us on the path of gospel mission full of joy.

1. Resolve to end your relational beef: (4:2-3)

In what might be one of the greatest and most awkward moments in the Philippian church's young history...

2 I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to agree in the Lord.

Imagine the room....

What we know:

- These women were key leaders in the mission (contended for the gospel alongside me)
- This is not a conflict over something that would be considered a key doctrinal issue.

This issue seems to fall more on the **secondary or even tertiary scale**. Something that should not divide has driven a wedge, and it's robbing these two women, and most likely those around them, of joy.

Real talk for just a moment: We Christians fight too much over secondary and tertiary issues. Plain and simple. The reason is because it's easier to accuse and disown than it is to listen and unite.

We too easily jump the traces of gospel unity over dumb things.

- A Christian Community that bicker smells to the world like a shoe that has stepped in dog waste. It stinks just enough to stay away from it.
- The people in our communities already have enough drama around them in their daily lives, so why would they want to come to a fellowship that offers more.

"In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity." St. Augustine

When you read Paul's writings, let's be very clear: He warns the church(es) of false teachers and says to steer clear. He even goes as far to say "remove these folks from the fellowship if they're practicing some serious immorality."

- In other words, there are some things worth dividing over. **TRUTH MATTERS.**
 - *(If you want some good handles on this for us on where we stand as a church, Pastor Bruce preached a sermon on Gospel Unity in 2019. Go listen to it. It's fantastic)*
 - **Paul draws the lines at theological importance and unity.** But there are things that you may disagree on with someone and still worship alongside them.

Did you catch that? The body of Christ should be a beautiful collection of misfits, agreeing on gospel essentials and learning to settle on secondary differences.

- **Being a mature follower of Jesus is not just about developing deep convictions, it is learning to show restraint in light of them.**

Ya'll, the church fights over some really dumb things, don't we?

- **School choices:¹ Put a homeschool and public school parent in the same room, grab your popcorn (as Joby says) and watch it unfold :)**
 - **Homeschool parent:** My kids will never set foot on the grounds of the pagan loving, culture affirming, pot smoking, **sports obsessed, not an ounce of biblical worldview public school system. NO SHOT.**

- **Public School Parent:** Well, I want my kids to grow up with things like...i dunno social skills. I love that your kid gets to go on field trips to the zoo every week but I'd like for lil'timmy to grow up learning how to play sports and do math, go INTO the world, not RETREAT from it.
- Gloves go off, round 1...ding ding!

Feeling Uncomfortable? THAT IS THE POINT! Paul is like, listen....this is getting out of hand. You're fighting tooth and nail on secondary and tertiary issues.

- Sports, Drinking, Politics....

²Now seriously, very important here: Christians should have strong convictions and opinions in regards to politics, immigration reform, environmental policies, dogs wearing sweaters and cats being walked on leashes. That's a good thing. You're called to live out the gospel in your community, and that is part of it. We don't want you, as a follower of Jesus, to check your brain at the door.

But, our minds are part of the fallen nature of all of us. What if, WHAT IF there's a small chance we may be wrong about some of those things? We just made secondary things primary.

Here's what I DO know...I may be wrong about cats, but I am NOT WRONG about the gospel.

¹ Joby Martin, "Gospel Unity" preached at The Church of Eleven22 on August 19, 2018.

² This section has thoughts built out from Tim Keller on Gospel Unity, JD Greear on Romans 14, Charlie Dates on The Gospel and Reconciliation, and Thaddues Williams (Confronting Injustice).

Some of you are in fights, quarrels, tiffs, beefs, with one another and it's not even a gospel issue. I'm here today to tell you, it's time to end the fight. Put your big boy and girl pants on, and bridge the gap.

3 Yes, I also ask you, true partner, to help these women who have contended for the gospel at my side, along with Clement and the rest of my coworkers whose names are in the book of life.

"Partners....coworkers...."the conflict resolution between believers needs the eyes, the heart, and the wisdom of the community of Jesus followers around them!!!

In other words...get in a connect group. And when you're in a connect group, don't just show up...do life together. Fight for the hearts of one another. Don't just do bible study, DO LIFE.

- And when you do life together, don't jump the traces of gospel unity when things get hard. Stay on course, resolve to settle the personal beef.

Friends, Jesus came to us (Emmanuel, God with us) to settle the relational beef between God and man. He came to make the wrong things right, and he would ultimately settle it at the cross. Because that's been made right vertically, we must make it right horizontally with others.

2.Resolve to Project and Pursue the Presence of Jesus (4:6-7)

Let's tackle the 1st one: Project Jesus!

4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! 5 Let your graciousness be known to everyone

Rejoice: that's the constant reminder. Your joy should overflow always. But, it doesn't just overflow here in the auditorium on Sunday's...it also overflows in the way that we engage with the people in our city.

Last week....Pastor Bruce made reference to something his wife, Mrs. Lori said, and it's been sitting heavy with me:

Do we see our city like Jonah saw Nineveh or do we see our city like Jesus saw Jerusalem? "

What kind of gospel outpost will we be in our communities? What will we be known for? With what posture will we engage our communities?

- In Acts 8:8, we get an account of Phillip's ministry in Samaria. And it says that as a result of his time, energy, and ministry in that region, "*There was great joy in the city.*"
- If Biltmore Church were to shut her doors forever tomorrow, would our city be thrilled that we're gone, or would they weep that they **lost a loving, generous, patient, gentle, community of people?**

The gospel asserts that we must be a church that we would be people, as Jeremiah writes, that "*Seek the welfare of your city, for when it thrives, you will thrive.*"

As a parent, when I am impatient with my kids and harsh with them, I get nowhere. I feel better, but I gain no ground.

But when I can be calm and gracious, the game changes.

How are we *projecting* Jesus to the city around us?

2nd part of that... Pursue Jesus

6 Don't worry about anything, but in everything, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Don't worry: easier said than done right? We all live with some kind of worry. Feeling uncertainty about what is ahead, whether right or wrong.

I dont have time to jump into a message on Worry and Anxiety, I want to hone more in on something else offered here: AN INVITATION to COME.

Have you ever looked at prayer that way? As an invitation from God to draw NEAR to him.

Paul says, listen....your anxiety, or worry, about the circumstances around you, the things you cannot control, is killing your joy. But there's a way forward, to come. Come to him. He is near. He is not far off. He is our peace.

But, you may ask, what can I come to God, at his invitation, and ask him for? **Everything!!** Literally anything I'm worried about.

J.D. Greear notes this list in Scripture that people came to God in prayer for. This is fun and insightful; just listen to this: ³

³ Big thanks to J.D. Greear, Pastor @ The Summit Church, Raleigh-Durham, NC for this list.

- Zachariah and Elizabeth wanted a family when they couldn't have kids so they prayed for a son.
- Solomon prayed for wisdom in his new job.
- Eliezer, Gen 24, prayed he could meet a pretty girl he could set his master Isaac up with.
- Samson prayed for water when he was thirsty and superhuman strength to accomplish a task.
- Joshua prayed for the sun to stand still so he could finish a battle
- Daniel had a weird dream and he didn't know what it meant, so he prayed for interpretation.
- Gideon thought God was calling him to do something, but he wasn't sure so he prayed for confirmation that he should do it.
- David prayed for forgiveness after committing adultery with Bathsheba. He prayed God would give him a clean heart and a renewed, steadfast spirit.
- Elijah prayed that it wouldn't rain.
- Paul prayed that some thorn in the flesh that bothered him would be taken away.
- The disciples prayed for boldness.
- Fathers in the NT prayed for their little girls to get better.
- Peter asked Jesus for financial help to pay his taxes.
- Jesus told his disciples to pray to get out of temptation
- He prayed that his disciples would stop acting like idiots and be unified.
- Jesus told us to pray for lost people and the workers to get the gospel to them.
- All the Apostles prayed for Jesus to come back quickly

Here's the rule: If it worries you, God cares deeply about it.

3. Resolve to walk in the traces of Jesus (v8-9)

8 Finally [c] brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable—if there is any moral excellence and if there is anything praiseworthy—dwell on these things. 9 Do what you have learned and received and heard from me, and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

DWELL or THINK on these things: *There is no enduring change in life, there is no meaningful Christ-exalting, sin-killing sanctification apart from a transformation in how you think. Your mind matters*⁴

There's a battle of the mind in Western Culture. Just take the American addiction to screens as one example ⁵

- The average American spends a minimum of four hours a day watching TV.
- The average American child spends 900 hours a year in school and from 1,200 to 1,800 hours a year watching TV.
- By the age of 20, the average American has seen 800,000 TV commercials. By the time they are 18 they will have seen 200,000 acts of violence.

⁴ Sam Storms, The Battle of the Mind

⁵<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/06/18/americans-60-and-older-are-spending-more-time-in-front-of-their-screens-than-a-decade-ago/>

- Here's the really scary thought. By the time the average American reaches the age of 65, *he/she will have spent nearly 8 years watching TV*

How hard is it for us to really dwell, to think, to marinate on things of the kingdom in a world full of distractions? It's so hard. But the fight is an essential one.

- We are, as many theologians and Psychologists have proven, the sum total of our thoughts.

You want to walk in the traces of Jesus? The Psalmist says in Psalm 119:9-11 "How does a man keep his way pure? By living according to your word. I have hidden your word in my heart that i might not sin against you."

Did you catch that? The way to stay on the trace. To keep walking on the path? IS TO KNOW (think on) and walk in the word of God.

- Where are we fixing our minds? Are we thinking on heavenly things? Kingdom things. Jesus himself

- Pure, just, lovely, admirable. Praiseworthy. IS there any other than Jesus himself?

You see, as you THINK on him, you can follow in the traces after him. Think and do.

CLOSE: Today, your next step may be to end a beef. Bring it to the altar. Make a phone call. Maybe, it's simply to COME to the invitation and pray. That's what that altar is for. Lay it down.

