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Partnering in Good News
December 11, 2016, Jeff Germo

This morning we are going to finish up our study of Philippians. We have only three short verses left. We will get to those eventually, but before we do that, I want to quickly run through each sermon we have done thus far and pick out the thread that weaves its way through this great letter in God's Word.

I think if we were honest we would all say that much of the time, even those of us who would consider ourselves devoted followers of Jesus, if we really thought about it, actually live as though God does not exist, or that Christ does not dwell in our hearts. That might sound shocking to hear me say that, but I do think it's true.

What I mean by that is that we respond, or react to stimuli in our lives with human responses such as fear, envy, jealousy, covetousness, hatred, anxiety, self-exaltation, and even self-loathing. Or, we walk around in shame for the sin that we have already confessed and have been forgiven for. We don't easily forgive others and we certainly don't easily forgive ourselves. Intellectually, we believe. I'm not arguing that. But, if we really believed from our hearts that God is real and that his Spirit lives in us we would not act out in the way we do, and I am speaking for me as much as I am for you.

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We tend to live as if the Gospel of Jesus is simply a nice story with a moral, like one of Aesop's Fables. We believe the Gospel on an intellectual level, but heart belief is much harder to come by. When the Gospel is just a truth that we acknowledge and give intellectual assent to, it loses its power. The Good News of Jesus is so much more than an intellectual idea. **The Gospel has power to change us if we let Jesus do his work in us.**

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Paul said in Romans 1:16, that the Gospel ***"is the power of God"***. And in **Romans 8:9-11**, which we read last week, Paul said that the same power that raised Jesus from the dead lives in us.

Romans 8:11 (NLT)

11 The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you.

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So, if we approach Scripture as just a book that contains principles to live by, and the Christian faith is just a lifestyle, or a way of life we choose, the Gospel is not good news at all. It is an impossibility, and a mean spirited cosmic joke played on us by a god with an evil sense of humour.

The Gospel is good news in that it is the *"power of God for salvation to all who believe"* (Romans 1:16).

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As we sprint through Philippians this morning we will see that, **as followers of Jesus, when we appropriate his Good News, his power will work in our hearts changing our characters so he can live his life through us.**

So, sermon number one:

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1. Philippians 1:1-2 – FULL OF JOY

“To all of God’s holy people...” Paul begins Philippians the same way he ends it. He reminds the believers who they are. Some of your Bibles, instead of ‘God’s holy people’ translate it ‘saints’. Paul calls the Jesus-followers in Philippi, ‘saints’, which simply means they are **set apart for Christ**. It doesn’t mean they have achieved some sort of higher level of spirituality. It means that, as Christ-followers, their lives count for something. They are living their lives on purpose.

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They have been set apart by the grace of God, through the death and resurrection of Jesus, by the power of the Holy Spirit to be about his business on earth.

The same is true of us, as followers of Jesus. We have not been left alone to figure it out. We have his Spirit living in us affecting change in our character, which is why **when we attempt to live the Christian life in our own effort, as if we are just meant to live according to the principles in the Bible, we devoid the Gospel of its power.**

When we learn to live in the power of the Gospel, our lives will overflow with joy because we will see God at work in us. We will see that he wants us to partner with him in what he is doing on earth. And when we do that, life gets exciting. It doesn’t get easy, but it does get more and more satisfying.

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2. Philippians 1:3-11 – PARTNERS IN THE GOSPEL

³ Every time I think of you, I give thanks to my God. ⁴ Whenever I pray, I make my requests for all of you with joy, ⁵ for you have been my partners in spreading the Good News about Christ from the time you first heard it until now.

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Paul thanks the Philippian church for their partnership in the Gospel; **their active, costly participation** in the work of extending God’s kingdom on earth. They were in the trenches together, working side by side. They were focused on a common goal. They worked hard together and didn’t squabble about minor things that didn’t matter, because that would have distracted them from the main thing which was the extension of God’s kingdom on earth. Their participation with Paul was active and costly. And to them it was worth the effort and the cost.

I have to tell you that every time I read this passage I think about you at CRBC. Last week I read an email from a young fourteen year old girl who has really grasped the essence of what it means to be apprenticed by Jesus. That was so amazing for us to hear that.

Just this past week I received a different kind of email from a newcomer at the church. She said she really enjoyed the service, but left with a bad taste in her mouth because nobody approached her family to make her feel welcome. That was shocking for me to hear because that has not been my experience at CRBC since I have been here. So many of you work really hard at making sure newcomers feel welcomed. Obviously we still have some work to do in making sure people don’t fall through the cracks. I don’t think that is at all the norm, but I do think we can grow.

What I see at CRBC is that you give of your time, your energy, and your financial resources, sometimes sacrificially, so the Gospel can be furthered in Campbell River and beyond. I feel the same way about you as Paul did about the Philippians. Whenever I am with other pastors I boast

about you in the Lord. God is using you in powerful ways to extend his kingdom on earth. We are in this together as partners.

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3. Philippians 1:12-18a – **WITH EVERY BREATH** (Adrian Moskal)

¹² And I want you to know, my dear brothers and sisters, that everything that has happened to me here has helped to spread the Good News.

Are you starting to pick up on a theme here? This was all Paul cared about. Paul knew the reason he existed; to advance the Good News of Jesus. Everything he did, no matter what it was, was for that purpose. Paul, as we have noted many times, was in prison chained to a guard 24/7. He had no idea if he would ever get out of prison alive, and yet **he saw that God was using his suffering as a way to advance the kingdom of Jesus.**

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Because of that eternal perspective he could have joy. He was chained to a guard and was able to share his faith in Jesus with him, and as we will see in the last verses of Philippians, some in the household of Caesar were believers because of Paul's suffering, and hence, he saw that it was worth all the pain.

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If we could all have that same eternal perspective, recognizing that God wants to do something through us, and that **he doesn't want to waste our pain** or suffering, we would be able to face our trials with greater resolve to allow God to work through them, and we could even have some of that same joy that overflowed from Paul.

Life is hard. There is nobody here who is immune to hardship. We all face it. Some of us more than others.

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We don't have to wait to experience God's peace and joy until we are free of pain. If we try we will never be satisfied, because as soon as one painful experience passes, another one is on its way. It's just how life on earth is. Pain, confusion, misunderstandings, and disappointments, are part of living in a broken world with broken people like us. But, God has promised to make something beautiful out of our pain if we let him. That is why we can have joy and peace. He wants to take you and do something significant with your life. And that's where joy comes from.

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4. Philippians 1:18b-26 – **BOLDLY GO** - (Steve Karadimas)

This passage is sort of strange. Paul has a little debate with himself about whether or not it would be best for him to be alive or dead. This was a real possibility for him. He actually didn't know if he would live or die, and so he has the conversation in the letter to the Philippians about which would better advance the gospel. That was his only criterion. The discussion sort of went like this: "If I die I'd be able to be with Jesus for eternity. Life would be blissful. But, if I live it would be better for the Philippian church, and the cause of the Good News of Jesus." Are you starting catch on to a theme here?

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²¹ For to me, living means living for Christ, and dying is even better.

Either way, in life or in death, Paul's goal was that the Good News of Jesus would be advanced. That was the criterion for every decision he made. If it would advance the Gospel of Jesus he would do it, if it served to do the opposite he wouldn't. He recognized that he was not the main

event or the main character in the big story of life, and that his part in the story is to point to Jesus in everything, even in his suffering.

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5. Philippians 1:27-30 – **EYE ON THE HORIZON** (Adrian Moskal)

27 Above all, you must live as citizens of heaven, conducting yourselves in a manner worthy of the Good News about Christ. Then, whether I come and see you again or only hear about you, I will know that you are standing together with one spirit and one purpose, fighting together for the faith, which is the Good News.

What does it mean to live a life worthy of the Good News? How do we best represent Jesus to those around us who desperately need a Savior? Paul says it very clearly here. We are to stand ***together with one spirit and one purpose, fighting together for the faith, which is the Good News.*** We work together in unity, with one purpose; that the good news of Jesus Christ would be advanced through us. Jesus never said, “Get religion”. He said, ***“Love one another”***.

Our brand, the thing we should be known for at CRBC, is our love for each other. That is how the world will know you are true followers of Jesus. Maintain unity. Stay united. Work and live with one purpose in mind; that the Good News of Jesus Christ would be advanced through our lives.

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There is only one way to live a life worthy of the Good News and that is to grow in our love for each other.

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Paul said the same thing in **Ephesians 4:1-3 (NLT)**.

1 Therefore I, a prisoner for serving the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of your calling, for you have been called by God. 2 Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love. 3 Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace.

That is what we are called to, so the Good News of Jesus will be advanced.

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6. Philippians 2:1-11 – **JUST GET ALONG** (Steve Karadimas)

This leads us to that very great passage of Scripture where Paul says that we...***must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. 6 Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. 7 Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, 8 he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross.***

This is totally opposite to the way we naturally live our lives. What's natural for us? We exalt ourselves. That's what we learn from watching TV, and in the movies. That's what we learn by watching our politicians who run our government. That's what we learn in the entertainment and sports industries. We are all being graded; and our goal is to be the best, have the best, and always be on top. The way of the Christ-follower is totally opposite. The way up is down, and the way down is up.

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Here's what Jesus said:

Luke 14:11 (NLT)

¹¹ For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

In *The Divine Conspiracy*, Dallas Willard writes,

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Recently a pilot was practicing high-speed maneuvers in a jet fighter. She turned the controls for what she thought was a steep ascent—and flew straight into the ground. She was unaware that she had been flying upside down.

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This is a parable of human existence in our times—not exactly that everyone is crashing, though there is enough of that—but most of us as individuals, and world society as a whole, live at high-speed, and often with no clue to whether we are flying upside down or right-side up. Indeed, we are haunted by a strong suspicion that there may be no difference—or at least that it is unknown or irrelevant.

This is the painful truth. We have been so acculturated by our society, and yes even the church, that we have had no idea that we have been flying upside down, and we rush from event to event, from crisis to crisis without ever taking time to evaluate whether or not the things we spend our time, energy and money on, really matter. If we are spending our lives trying to exalt ourselves we're living upside down. We are living in a way that is opposite to what God has called us to. We are wasting our time. God has a much more satisfying existence for us than that.

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7. Philippians 2:12-18 – *MIRRORS FOR THE SON*

¹²...Work hard to show the results of your salvation, obeying God with deep reverence and fear. ¹³ For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him. ¹⁴ Do everything without complaining and arguing, ¹⁵ so that no one can criticize you. Live clean, innocent lives as children of God, shining like bright lights in a world full of crooked and perverse people.

There has been a misconception in the evangelical church that as Christians we are not to make any effort to change because that is understood as trying to *earn* our salvation. The unfortunate truth is that these Christians who have held to this conviction have remained immature. They fill their minds with lots of great biblical knowledge, but don't let it work into their hearts. They have fat heads and weak hearts, not progressing in their faith because they are opposed to cooperating with Jesus, who wants to gently and humbly teach them. Paul, very clearly, over and over again, in his letters talks about the need for followers of Jesus to train hard and cooperate with the Holy Spirit as he affects change in them.

That's what Paul says in 2:12, “***Work hard to show the results of your salvation.***” What could be clearer than that? Why are we to do this? So that we shine ***like bright lights in the world.*** The reason is because God so loved the world. He wants more people to know him, and the only plan he has for that to happen is you and me representing him in the world. We are mirrors of the Son.

Remember the mirror illustration I gave several weeks ago. We are like the moon that has no light of its own. It reflects the light of the sun. We are to reflect the light of the Son of God as he lives his life through us.

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I hope you are seeing a theme weaving its way through Philippians. The very obvious theme is that God wants to change us so he can reach more people to join him in his work on earth and then finally in heaven.

Can you imagine how life would be different if we all had that focus in our lives? It would be a game changer for all of us. The things that normally upset us wouldn't bother us because they would no longer be important. The people who normally annoy us would no longer be a problem to us, not necessarily because they changed, but because we've changed.

In this next section we want to look at, 2:19-30, Paul mentions two men by name, Timothy and Ephaphroditus, singling them out as servants of Christ who have given sacrificially for the sake of the Gospel. They had the Gospel as the lens through which they viewed life.

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8. Philippians 2:19-30 - SOLD OUT FOR JESUS

19 If the Lord Jesus is willing, I hope to send Timothy to you soon for a visit. Then he can cheer me up by telling me how you are getting along. 20 I have no one else like Timothy, who genuinely cares about your welfare. 21 All the others care only for themselves and not for what matters to Jesus Christ.

There are a couple of phrases that sort of jump out when I read these verses. Both are sad statements about human nature. The first is that Paul says he has *no one else* like Timothy, and secondly that *everyone else* selfishly seeks their own interests above Christ.

Now, Paul is obviously using hyperbole here because there are others he commends for their faithfulness besides Timothy. I think his point is that Timothy was exceptional in that he saw everything through the lens of the Gospel.

So the question for us here is, do we have the Gospel of Jesus as the lens through which we view life? When making decisions, do we ask, "Is this going to further the Gospel, or will it hinder it?"

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How would your life change if you saw the world through the lens of the Good News of Jesus?

What kinds of things would you think are important? What would you give your time, energy, and resources to? What sorts of arguments that you have now would cease to happen because those things no longer threaten your image, or sense of worth? These are good questions to think about because that is what God wants to move each of towards. And we cannot make those changes just by pulling ourselves up by our bootstraps. We do not have the right stuff to change our hearts. We need to invite the Holy Spirit to change our hearts and minds.

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9. Philippians 3:1-11 - CHURCH GARBAGE - (Steve Karadimas)

As I was reading through Philippians again and going through the past sermons I was amazed at how consistent the theme of living our lives full out for the Gospel was in each of the passages. Nowhere is that more evident than in these next verses.

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⁷ I once thought these things were valuable, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done. ⁸ Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ

Just previous to these verses Paul had just expounded on how, before he met Jesus, in the eyes of the world, and especially his fellow Jews, he had it all. He was highly educated. He was very religious, and had high ranking in Jewish circles. He had a flawless pedigree. He was so zealous for the God of the Jews that he spent his life persecuting Christians because he thought that they were against God. He had an impeccable reputation among his colleagues and peers. People looked up to him. He had it all.

And yet, he says that all of that meant nothing to him when it was put alongside knowing Jesus. Knowing Jesus was a game changer for him. Even his reputation, which was previously so important to him, was no longer of consequence.

When you see all of life through the lens of the Gospel there is no longer a need to defend yourself. There will no longer be a need to strike back, or be so concerned about your image or reputation because the thing that is most important to you is no longer self-comfort, or self-adulation. The thing that will become most important will be the Good News of Jesus being extended through your life, whether it is through good times or bad. Everything will become about Jesus, which means you will no longer have to walk around wondering what people think of you. Doesn't that sound like it would be a good place to be?

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10. Philippians 3:12-21 - *RUNNING HARD IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION*

¹³...I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴ I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us.

The image Paul paints here is a race. A skilled runner knows if she is going to win a race she must not look back over her shoulder. Her eyes must be on the goal, straining with every muscle, with all her energy pressing towards the finish line. Looking back can cause her to lose her stride or get off course.

Paul says we must forget what lies behind and strain forward to what lies ahead. What kinds of things is he talking about forgetting? Well, he has just finished expounding all of his accomplishments, so this is obviously what he is referring to. In our effort to move towards living our lives fully for Jesus there will be times when we will look back and think that the old life was easier, or more fun, or more lucrative, or pleasurable, or whatever.

We used to be so concerned about our image and reputation that we wouldn't humble ourselves by admitting failure. We had to project a spiritual image, especially at church. We couldn't admit that we struggled with sin because people would think less of us. That is bondage. Do you know that every single person here struggles with the same thoughts?

Ever since The Fall in the fall in the Garden of Eden at the beginning of time, we are all tempted to cover up and pretend that everything is ok. The problem with that kind of thinking is that as long as we continue along that path we cannot grow. Growth takes honesty and transparency.

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And Paul says, **when you are tempted to go back keep your eyes fixed on the prize, conformity to the image of Christ.** Press on with everything you have as you cooperate with Jesus. Always hold that vision in front of you. God wants your character to be continually transformed to look like Jesus so others would see him in you.

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11. Philippians 4:1-3 - **WORKING TOGETHER — IN UNITY**

In this next passage, Paul turns his attention to a couple of ladies who were experiencing some conflict, Euodia and Syntyche. He urges the church to do whatever they can to help these ladies restore peace in their relationship. We asked the question, why was this squabble between two ladies in the church so important that Paul had to bring it up publicly in a letter that, not only the Philippian church would read, but would be circulated in other churches in other areas, and in churches all over the world including ours in 2016?

And for that we turned to John 17:20-30 where Jesus prays what we call his high priestly prayer. He first prays for himself. Then he prays for his disciples that are with him, and then he looks with eyes of faith into the future and prays for you and me at CRBC.

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And he prays that we would **“experience such perfect unity that the world will know that you sent me and that you love them as much as you love me.”** (John 17:-23 NLT)

It is imperative that we work hard to maintain unity in the church for the sake of the Good News of Jesus. Rightly or wrongly, the world will judge Jesus based on whether or not we love each other.

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The way we act inside and outside these walls matters. The way we treat each other, whether or not we love and forgive one another, will reflect either negatively or positively on Jesus and his church.

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The spread of the Gospel, the good news about Jesus, will rise or fall based on whether or not we work hard at learning to work together in unity.

This leads us very nicely to our next passage.

12. Philippians 4:4-9 - **LIVING IN PEACE**

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We’ve just noted that unity will not happen unless we are purposeful about working hard for it, and the reason is that our default setting, as fallen human beings, is to think that “life is about me.” The problem we have is that we cannot change our default setting. That is how we have been wired ever since the fall of humankind in The Garden. We may think we are making some headway on our own once in a while, but we will always default to our natural position when we are backed into a corner or stressed in some way. We will think that life is about us. And so because of that we need an extreme makeover of our hearts and minds, as Paul says in Romans 12:1-2, so we actually want to live in the way God wants us to live, which is to put the interests of others ahead of ourselves.

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GOD HAS CALLED US TO SOMETHING MUCH BIGGER AND MORE SATISFYING THAN A LIFE FOCUSED ON ME.

Paul begins this next section by exhorting the believers to be continually joyful.

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Philippians 4:4 (NLT)

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

Now, this of course, is not an easy task. As a matter of fact, it's impossible.

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Paul is calling us to have a change of perspective that only God, through his Spirit can make for us, as we cooperate with him.

We noted, when we looked at this text, that the word, "rejoice" at the beginning of the passage and the word, "peace" at the end act as sort of bookends containing the recipe to achieving joy and peace.

Here's the recipe:

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

1. Be reasonable, gentle, and considerate.

That's where we have to start. If we start with pushing our own agenda in our relationships we will have neither peace nor joy. If, however, we start from a position of considering others first, we will be a long way down the road to achieving both peace and joy. Again, that means we will have to do what does not come naturally. We will have to seek first to understand, rather than being understood. That is not the natural posture of our hearts.

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2. Leave the outcome to God.

We are not responsible for how others react. We are only responsible for our own responses and behaviours. That's what Paul meant when he said, "***the Lord is coming soon.***" Leave it to God. Don't try to force your way. Allow room for God to judge, if we take it upon ourselves to be the judge of others we take God's job from him.

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3. Pray with thanksgiving.

Philippians 4:6-7 (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.

God already knows about your problems and issues, but he wants us to develop a relationship with him by talking to him about these things. Bring them to him with an attitude of gratitude and then, Paul says, "God will give you a peace that is beyond anything that you can understand." How many of you have experienced that?

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4. Focus your mind on good things.

Philippians 4:8 (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.

If we focus on the problem, the problem will get bigger and God will get smaller in our minds. Do the opposite. Fix your eyes on Jesus. Turn your thoughts towards things that are good, and honourable, and right and pure.

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5. Practice

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.

Practice these things. You will fail once in a while, or often. That's ok. That is why we practice, because we are not perfect at it, but as we practice them we will have both peace and joy, which are inseparable. We will be surprised by the joy and peace of God.

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13. Philippians 4:10-20 - **LEARNING TO LEAN ON JESUS**

The verse that stand out in this last section is 4:11;

¹¹ Not that I was ever in need, for I have learned how to be content with whatever I have.

Paul learned to trust God implicitly, no matter if he was well taken care of or in great need. His heart was focused upward not on the things of this earth. He didn't have his eyes on a bigger and better car, or moving up the corporate ladder, keeping up with his neighbours. His only goal in life was that the Gospel of Jesus would be advanced through his life, and because of that he could let go of his earthly desire. The things that bother most of us didn't bother him. He left the outcome of his life to God.

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14. Philippians 4:21–23 - **CONCLUSION**

And the result in his life was that the Gospel spread like wildfire wherever he went.

Philippians 4:21–23 (NLT)

²¹ Give my greetings to each of God's holy people—all who belong to Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me send you their greetings. ²² And all the rest of God's people send you greetings, too, especially those in Caesar's household. ²³ May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

What do you notice here? Paul calls some of the people in Caesar's household, '**God's people**', or "**Saints**" in some translations. In other words, because of Paul's imprisonment, perhaps some of the prison guards came to Christ, maybe some of Caesar's family, maybe some high officials, or some servants.

The reason Paul could be so content even though his circumstances were miserable was because he was being used for the purposes for which he existed. He didn't worry about many of the things we often have our hearts are on. He was focused on one thing and one thing only, that the Gospel of Jesus would be expanded through him.

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That is the same reason God has us on this earth. That is the very same reason God has CRBC in the place where it is, and you are here working alongside us – so that the Gospel of Jesus can be expanded through your life, whether it is in good times or bad. God wants to do something bigger than what we could ever imagine. When we live like that, the same joy and peace Paul experienced, can be ours.