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Philippians 4:2-9

Discipleship 101: The Connection Between My Peace & Our Peace

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I worked on a ranch for a summer. While I was there I helped brand cows, run cattle through chutes, and even tagged one cow's ear. I'm not much of an animal person, but I **do know** that in a cattle herd the health of **one cow** can affect the health of the **whole herd**. Sickness and disease can spread quickly, so you want to make sure each cow is healthy. If one cow becomes **stressed**, it can get sick, and that sickness can spread.

We see this same **principle** in lots of places. When one **animal** or **fish** becomes stressed, it can become sick, and that sickness can spread. When one child at school gets exhausted, she gets sick, then teachers, parents, and classmates get sick too. This is **true** of our church as well. When one of us gets anxious or fearful or upset, we can spread our anxiety, fear, and emotions to the **whole church**.

In Philippians, Paul writes to a church that is only about a **decade old**. It's a **young church** and it's susceptible to anxiety and worry. And so, Paul writes them a letter explaining the connection between **individual anxiety** and **corporate peace**. None of us want to be anxious, and hopefully we don't want to **spread** that anxiety to others, so let's hear what Paul has to say. In Philippians 4:2-9, Paul gives us...

Seven connections between my peace and our peace:

Paul doesn't say, here are seven connections, but as we read the passage, we see the **principles**.

1. Two people in conflict can drag a whole church into conflict. (v. 2)

As we've gone throughout this letter, we've seen Paul implying conflict within the church:

- conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel (1:27a)
- stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one (1:27b)
- in humility value others above yourselves (2:3)
- do everything without grumbling or arguing (2:14)
- everyone looks out for their own interests (2:21)

He's been writing to them as a **church body**, and now he writes to two **individuals** within that church body. He **personally admonishes** them in verse 2, "I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord." Paul has worked backward, first **addressing** the big-picture conflict before addressing what could be one of its **causes**—two women who can't get along.

The lesson for us is simple. When I'm upset with someone, if I don't deal with that with the Lord and (if needed) with them, it's like an **undressed wound** that can become **infected**. Pretty sound that infection spreads, either killing the whole church body or leading to an **amputation**, when a **church splits** or believers **leave**. #1 *Two people in conflict can drag a whole church into conflict*. So what's the **cure**?

2. One peace-making disciple can create a culture of peace. (v. 3)

All Scriptures are quoted from the New International Version (NIV®) unless otherwise noted.

The next verse says, “Yes, and I ask you, my true companion, help these women...” We don’t know who Paul is addressing, but he calls on him to act as a **mediator** (a peace-maker) to help Euodia and Syntyche get along. Some other **versions** of the Bible translate “companion” as “**yokefellow**.” He is someone who can help these two women who are **pulling in opposite directions** pull in the same direction.

Thierry preached here in August. He told me that when they were starting their church plant in France, their team was split. One side wanted to focus on **evangelism**, and the other side on **discipleship**. So he rented a crew-length **rowboat** and had his whole team get in. He told them to just go. And so they all started rowing and they couldn’t get anywhere because they were each pulling in their own direction. So he stopped them, told them to **listen** to his **voice**, and this time, **row together**. When they all worked together, they went somewhere. Thierry said this outing **transformed** their team from pulling in opposite directions to working together. Thierry is a yokefellow, a peace-maker.

One peace-maker can help a **whole church** have peace. **How** can you tell if you’re a yokefellow? Have you experienced conflict **firsthand** and not **run** away from it, but stuck it through to work it out? For example, let’s say you get an argument with someone here at this church, and you keep attending faithfully and trying to work it out, then you could be a yokefellow. We shouldn’t ignore the problem but **address** it. Are you someone who is willing to address conflict and **prayerfully** work it out? If you can do it in your life, then maybe you can help others too. #2 *One peace-making disciple can create a culture of peace.*

3. Anxiety in me produces anxiety in us. (v. 4-6a)

Paul switches once again from addressing the two individual women and their peacemaker, to addressing the church as a whole. Verses 4-5, “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.” Both of the **commands** are to you **plural**, “You all rejoice!” In verse 6 we see the same, “(you all) Do not be anxious about anything...” This command is to the whole church.

How can a **whole church** be anxious? If it’s made up of a bunch of **anxious individuals**. How can whole church **rejoice**? If we all choose to **rejoice together**. To help the church address their **anxiety problem**, Paul gives himself as an example.

Philippians 4:11b-13 I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength. (NIV®)

Paul had plenty to worry about, but instead he rejoices because God is there for him. If he can be **content** while **under house** arrest facing trial and potentially **death**, so can we. Like we read in Philippians 1:14, his confidence and hope in trial **emboldened** the early church. Anxiety in me produces **anxiety** in us. But likewise, **peace** in me produces peace in us, and **joy** in me produces joy in us.

When each of us cultivates peace, it benefits the whole church. If you’re constantly anxious and you don’t want to get **counseling**, if you won’t do it for yourself, do it for the church, do it for the **flock**. As your pastor, when I feel anxiety in my heart, I want to deal with it so I don’t transmit it to you. I think that’s true of every one of your **Elders** and **Deacons** as well, but it doesn’t stop with us. **All** of us, especially as a small church, shape our **culture**. #3 *Peace in me produces peace in us.* So you **want** it, but **how** do you get it?

4. No matter your situation, pray, and you will know peace. (v. 6b-7)

What’s Paul’s solution to anxiety? **Prayer**. *Prayer is talking to God*. He continues in verse 6, “but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.” Paul calls us to prayer. In

fact, he **commands** prayer; “present your requests” is an imperative. And if that’s not enough, he says the **word** prayer and **synonyms** (substitutes) for the word prayer **four** times total. Steven Lawson, in *Philippians For You*, breaks down each of these words like this:

- A. **Prayer** - General term for **intercession** to God (intercession means asking God to intervene, asking him to be your peace-maker, your mediator, your helper).
- B. **Petition** - Asking for something we **lack** (not enough food, money, or time causes anxiety).
- C. **Thanksgiving** - We approach God gratefully (there’s always something to be thankful for).
- D. **Requests** - Ask God for specific needs (so he can give you specific answer; pray for four new **tires**, for your exact **mortgage** payment, for a new **job**, for healing for your **lime disease**).

If we **pray**, Paul promises that we will receive the **peace** of God. He adds in verse 7, “And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” In other words, if you pray to God through Christ Jesus, Jesus will provide you with **supernatural peace** that doesn’t make sense, that’s not dependent on circumstances, that’s entirely dependent on Jesus who is **with** you.

I saw this kind of peace that surpasses all understanding in the face of trouble and anxiety with my childhood friend **Rachel**. She died a year ago this past summer from **cancer**. Her death was a battle. It was slow and ugly and her family said that she would get overwhelmed with fear and pain. But when she prayed to Jesus, when she remembered him and his promises, her anxiety would fade, and her face would relax. Maybe you’re facing **sickness**, or family or financial **hardship**. You can experience peace through prayer. #4 *No matter your situation, pray, and you will know peace.*

5. Our mindset determines our peace, so think on good things. (v. 8)

Paul gives us another command in verse 8. He tells us to think on **good things**. “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.” I thought about defining each of these words, but I don’t want to be here all night. **Essentially**, this is a list of **good** things that **honor** God.

But in a world of **options**, how can we tell what is good and honors God? Should we only watch **Christian movies** and listen to Christian **music**? Sometimes we focus so much on the **adjectives** here (true, noble, right, pure, etc.) that we miss the **pronouns** Paul repeats six times, “**whatever**.” Whatever is true, whatever is noble, etc., whether it is “Christian” or not, is worth focusing on. **Gordon Fee** writes:

... it is decidedly not Paul's view that only what is explicitly Christian (be it literature, art, music, movies or whatever) is worth seeing or hearing. Truth and beauty are where you find them. But at all times the gospel is the ultimate paradigm for what is true, noble or admirable.¹

This means that we can enjoy a good **book**, **television** show, or **movie**, we can appreciate an **art museum**, we can go for **nature** walks, and we can enjoy an **amusement park**. If we’re not addicted, we can enjoy a **nice wine** or **beer**. Now I **wrestle** with this principle. Just the other day I was working out at the **gym** when a **song** came on that I thought was really catchy. I asked my coach who it was, he went over and looked it up, and I said, “I like how this song sounds.” At that same time I realized what the singer was saying, and I thought, “I don’t like what this musician is saying.” I **didn’t** say that **out-loud**, but I wrestled with whether I should have or not. It’s **not easy** to navigate focusing on what is **pure** in a world of **sin**.

¹ Fee, Gordon D. *Philippians* (The Ivp New Testament Commentary Series) (p. 178). Intervarsity Press - A. Kindle Edition.

Paul is calling all of us to **intentionally** focus on what is **right** in this world instead of what is **wrong** in this world, to be **optimistic** and **hopeful**. That's difficult because the **evening news** and **online news** always leads with the **worst headlines** because they're the most **catchy**, "Newest healthcare proposal in Washington will kill you," or "Tax-cuts for the rich only" or "Loss of power in New England freezes Pastor." So as we apply verse 8 to our lives, it very well may mean **turning off** the **news** or not watching that **TV show**.

But **ultimately**, like Gordon Fee says, the **gospel** is the **best example** of what is true, noble, and admirable. At the end of the day, these verses describe the life and ministry of **Jesus**. Somehow he kept his mind on what is pure and good even as he entered into our **sin-filled** world and **ate** and **drank** with **sinner**s (Luke 7:34). Somehow Jesus enjoyed the good in what God had provided without falling into temptation. #5 *Our mindset determines our peace, so think on good things* (think on **Christ** and the **gospel**).

6. Receive peace through obedience and imitation. (v. 9)

It matters not only what we **think**, but also what we **do**. Paul finishes his thought in verse 9, "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." Paul is saying two things:

- 1) **Obey God's Word** - Paul calls for them to do whatever he has taught them. That means everything in this letter, everything in the Scriptures, everything in God's Word. God lays out his plan for us and every human in the **Bible**. When we trust and obey him, we will **naturally** experience more peace as God answers our prayers and we're **spared** the natural **consequences** of disobedience. For example, if I **gossip** about others, the natural consequence is conflict. But if I **love** others, like Jesus calls for in the Bible, I am setting myself up to experience peace with them. *Obey God's Word*.
- 2) **Imitate mature believers** - Paul says, "Do what you've seen me do." I feel like for a **sermon series on discipleship**, we haven't talked much about **older** more **mature** believers pouring into **younger** believers. That's a **huge** part of discipleship, and Paul is encouraging it right here. If you need help discerning what is good and pure, look for someone who is **older** and **wiser** than you, and has known Christ for a longer period of time, and **imitate** them. Watch their lives as you wrestle with these issues, and ask for their opinions. *Imitate mature believers*.

Verse 9 ends, "And the God of peace will be with you." We obey and we imitate because we want to experience **God's presence** unhindered by our own sin or disobedience. At the end of the day, God's presence is what brings peace into our lives. #6 *Receive peace through obedience and imitation*.

7. We can only receive real peace in Christ Jesus. (v. 3, 7)

I want to **go back** and **highlight** the disagreement between Euodia and Syntyche. Paul ends verse 3 by affirming both are **saved** in Christ Jesus, "help these women... whose names are in the book of life." In order to have your name written in the book of life, you have to be **in Christ** (Luke 10:20; Rev 3:5, 20:12). *If you want to trade your conflict for peace, you need to know Jesus*.

Then again in verse 7 Paul says, "And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." *If you want to trade your anxiety for peace, you need to know Jesus*.

The **problem** is that we're all born in sin and start this life at **war** with God. How can I ever hope to have peace in this life if I'm an **enemy** of the one who created this life? I can't! This is why before you try to put any of these principles into practice, you need to become a **friend of God**. You do this by confessing your sins, which means confessing all the ways you **disobey** God and don't act like Jesus, and then you place your faith in Jesus to save you. When you do, Jesus **grants** you friendship with God. Confession and faith isn't a

one time deal, but a **lifelong commitment** as day-by-day you get to know Jesus more and more through the Scriptures, prayer, and a church community that loves you. **If you don't know Christ yet**, it can begin with a prayer. #7 *We can only receive real peace in Christ Jesus.*

If I were to sum up today's passage, and all seven connections between my peace and our peace, I would do so this way. This is my big idea.

Real peace in me and in us is found in Christ.

Peace is never just a me issue. Nor is it just a them issue. It's always an us issue. And it's an us issue that includes someone who is bigger than all of us, Christ Jesus. I can have peace as an individual and we can have peace as a church as Christ Jesus lives in us. *True peace in me and in us is found in Christ.*

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