

Devotions – July 26 – August 1, 2020
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Words of Encouragement During Difficult Times from the Apostle Paul:

Philippians 4:4-8 (CEV)

Always be glad because of the Lord! I will say it again: Be glad. Always be gentle with others. The Lord will soon be here. Don't worry about anything, but pray about everything. With thankful hearts offer up your prayers and requests to God. Then, because you belong to Christ Jesus, God will bless you with peace that no one can completely understand. And this peace will control the way you think and feel.

Finally, my friends, keep your minds on whatever is true, pure, right, holy, friendly, and proper. Don't ever stop thinking about what is truly worthwhile and worthy of praise.

Sunday, July 26, 2020

Text: Philippians 4:4

Always be glad because of the Lord! I will say it again: Be glad.

These are not happy times. There are troubling events being reported wherever we look. And yet Paul's words encourage us to ***always*** be glad! Why? What is there to be glad about? Paul tells us. Always be glad because of the Lord! If troubles face me on all fronts, I can be glad because of who the Lord is and what he has done for me. I can face the troubles I see because the Lord is with me.

Let us pray: *Today Lord, I can be glad for this rainy day. Because rain or sun, heat or snow, you have overcome all the troubles of the world. Thank you, Lord, because in your love I can be glad, always. Amen.*



Monday, July 27, 2020

Text: Philippians 4:5

Always be gentle with others. The Lord will soon be here.

It seems news broadcasts on most days are highlighted by tragic stories of hurtful behaviors and unfounded judgements between individuals. Are these stories covered to make news or has the frequency of events like these really increased so much? Most of us make quick judgements about a situation without knowing all the facts. We may not treat each other with the gentleness

Paul suggests. Not at first anyway. Gentle thoughts and reactions are hard to learn, even harder to practice. Two of our granddaughters were visiting last week, playing with bubbles in the front yard. Bubbles big and small were causing squeals of delight from both, but the 4-year old was intent on gently catching as many as she could back on the bubble wand. Caught up in the excitement of the moment, the 2-year old was all about chasing and smashing all the bubbles as fast as they came floating in the air. A reminder to me that treating others with gentle thoughts and actions may not be a first response to every situation, but a gentle response will bring its own wonders and rewards.

Let us pray: *Lord, help me practice gentleness today, in my thoughts, my judgements and my actions toward others. Amen.*



Tuesday, July 28, 2020

Text: Philippians 4:6a

Don't worry about anything, but pray about everything. With thankful hearts offer up your prayers and requests to God.

Really Paul, do you know what you're suggesting? I'll readily admit I don't know what daily life was like in Philippi, but I have a close-up view of life in the UP and we have things that worry us. Unemployment, sickness, limited healthcare options, daily restrictions, the list goes on. How can we **not** worry? Paul tells us, don't worry, but pray. I remember my confirmation days, eons ago, when Pastor Leon Appel asked us what were the strongest two words in the Bible? His answer was, "but God". No matter what problems we threw at him, his answer was, but God is bigger, knows all about it, is with you, will see you through.

Paul tells us in a similar way, from prison no less, knowing he may be facing imminent death, don't waste your energy worrying, but pray about everything. Nothing that concerns you is too small or too big to bring before God.

Let us pray: *Today has many troubles Lord, I cannot see past them, but you can. Show me how to leave my worries in your hands for this moment, for this day. Amen.*



Wednesday, July 29, 2020

Text: Philippians 4:6b

With thankful hearts offer up your prayers and requests to God.

There is always something to be thankful for, an attitude of gratitude. Even in the middle of suffering, grief and loss.

When my boys were little, every Thanksgiving I would challenge them to think of something they were thankful for that starts with the letters of the alphabet. Not a bad practice really. When I'm in situations where I need to be patient, and I am not, I bring that task to mind. Usually, I don't get very far into the alphabet before I see my situation in a better light. But, just in case I need the entire alphabet, I have a granddaughter named Zinnia that fills my heart with joy and gratitude!

Let us pray: *God, you have blessed us with every good gift. Thank you for moments when we can pause and be grateful for our abundance. In your Son's name, the greatest gift of all. Amen.*



Thursday, July 30, 2020

Text: Philippians 4:7

Then, because you belong to Christ Jesus, God will bless you with peace that no one can completely understand. And this peace will control the way you think and feel.

Recently at my Mom's funeral, Pastor Gerald Ferguson shared this passage from Philippians. It feels like guidance from Paul on how to get through tough times. Not preached as a to-do list for followers of Christ, but more like helpful hints from his perspective – between a rock and a hard place. His message could not be clearer: "...because you belong to Christ Jesus, God will bless you with peace that no one can completely understand."

Even though every day some new media report, phone call or letter in the mail brings those feelings of tension and anxiety in my stomach, I can find peace and comfort in these words. And I don't completely understand it.

Let us pray: *God, our constant companion, we are so grateful that you travel each day with us amid the potholes and speed bumps in our life. Grant us this peace that comes, not from anything we could ever do, only from your precious Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.*



Friday, July 31, 2020

Text: Philippians 4:8a

Finally, my friends, keep your minds on whatever is true, pure, right, holy, friendly, and proper.

These times are more challenging than most of us have seen in our entire lives. My Mom was born during the “Great Depression,” and she would share memories of difficult times when their family had little food, few opportunities for work with little pay, the challenges of making what little they did have stretch to meet the needs of a family with eight children. For the first time in my life I have seen empty shelves in the grocery store, leaving me to wonder what will come next. As Paul tells the Philippians he speaks to us, keep your mind on other things: things that are true and pure and holy; look for the best and the beautiful; things worthy of praise.

This reminds me of the refrain from an old, familiar hymn by Helen H. Lemmel:

*Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in His wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim
In the light of His glory and grace. Amen.*



Saturday, August 1, 2020

Text: Philippians 4:8b

Don't ever stop thinking about what is truly worthwhile and worthy of praise.

Why me? We've all thought it, maybe even said it once or twice. It comes with that feeling of loss or confusion, pain, or fear about our current life situation. We just don't understand why this is happening to us. Paul does. In his words to the Christians at Philippi, he knows they may have to suffer in the days ahead, just as Jesus had suffered, as Paul and other believers were suffering. But Paul considers his suffering to be a blessing and encourages all who suffer to keep their thoughts on what is worthwhile and praiseworthy.

When I am hurting, it is very hard to think happy thoughts, but Paul doesn't say to stop thinking about the pain of the moment. He tells us to not stop thinking about what is truly worthwhile, and God who gives peace will be with us, right where we are, in the messy and pain filled part of life.

Let us pray: *Thank you, God, for Paul's words of encouragement. These are messy times, challenging times and painful times. But you are here with us through it all. We praise and thank you for loving us beyond our understanding. Amen.*

